

# **DEVELOPMENT DOSSIER**

## **ENGENDERING THE GLOBAL AGENDA**

**The Story of Women  
and the United Nations**

*by Hilikka Pietilä*

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# ENGENDERING THE GLOBAL AGENDA: THE STORY OF WOMEN AND THE UNITED NATIONS

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*by Hilikka Pietilä*

**N G L S**

Hilkka Pietilä, Secretary General of the Finnish UN Association from 1963-1990, has been active in the international women's movement for many years and has attended all the UN world conferences on women. This paper is a revised and updated adaptation of Occasional Paper No. 1/1999: *Engendering the Global Agenda: A Success Story of Women and the United Nations*, published by the International Training and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

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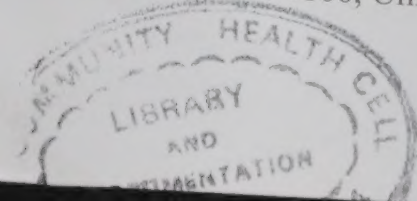
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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This book covers more than eighty years of history between women and inter-governmental organizations. Unrecorded by history and untold by the media, this book recalls the success story of women and the League of Nations and describes the unfolding history of women at the United Nations up to the great progress for advancement and empowerment of women that was achieved in the last decade of the 20th century. Thus this is a complementary monograph to the book *Making Women Matter: The Role of the United Nations*, which I published with Jeanne Vickers in 1990 (third updated edition by Zed Books in 1996).

It was the international women's movement, which was itself in the making at the time, that had an impact on the foresight reflected in the principles governing the creation of the United Nations. All due credit should be therefore given to the "founding mothers" of cooperation between the women's movement and the UN.

This book tells the story of how the United Nations has become a women-friendly global institution in spite of being a forum of governments, the great majority of which still reflect mainly the visions and aspirations of men. Through the strenuous and skilful diplomacy and struggles of women over the decades, women's aspirations and visions have been brought to the forefront of the international agenda and have resulted in Declarations, Covenants and Programmes for the advancement and empowerment of women, which go beyond existing legislation and policies in most of the UN Member States.

My former publications on this subject and this *Development Dossier* are related to the United Nations Intellectual History Project, which is set to become, finally, a written history of the economic, social and cultural activities of the UN system. Until now this dimension of the UN's history has not been written, taught,

studied, nor researched in the colleges and universities of the world. I hope this *Development Dossier* contributes to filling that gap in academia.

This book is also the latest outcome of the long-term cooperation between the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) and myself from NGLS's inception in 1975, first during the years of my work as the Secretary General of the Finnish United Nations Association (1963-1990) and then in connection with the publication of books and booklets on the advancement of women by the United Nations since 1985. Therefore my very warm thanks goes again to NGLS and my good friend and NGLS Coordinator, Tony Hill. I would also like to thank Adrienne Cruz and Beth Peoc'h of NGLS for their role as linguistic editors, and Suroor Alikhan for her cooperation in finalizing the manuscript.

Finally I would like to express my gratitude to the United Nations and NGLS for their generosity in making this book available to all interested readers.

Hilkka Pietilä  
Helsinki, January 2002

## **PROLOGUE—WOMEN AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS**

In the 1920s and 1930s women's international organizations, which were still young, had interesting collaboration with the first inter-governmental peace organization, the League of Nations. This collaboration also gave them important experience for participating effectively in the process of the founding of the United Nations after the Second World War. This early history of engendering inter-governmental politics attracted, surprisingly late, the interest of researchers at the beginning of the 1990s (Miller, 1992). During this time the process of engendering the global agenda also led to irreversible achievements.

The founding of the League of Nations marked the beginning of organized and institutionalized inter-governmental collaboration in a form that was unprecedented. This was the first step in joint foreign policy between governments toward supra-national goals—such as peace and security—instead of each nation merely defending its individual interests against the interests of others. Women immediately realized the nature of the cooperation and had good reason to become interested in it. First, all inter-governmental cooperation aimed at ending wars and violence, and the settlement of disputes through negotiations, which corresponded with women's yearning for peace. This desire was particularly strong in people's minds after the destruction and horrors of the First World War.

Another reason for women's commitment to inter-governmental collaboration right from the beginning was their firm belief in the fact that the advancement of women in different countries required governmental policies and democratic opportunities for women to influence those policies. Women were united across borders as they worked to promote peace, and they saw promising chances to empower themselves in these new forms of inter-governmental cooperation.

It is amazing to see how well-prepared international women's organizations influenced the inter-governmental process right after the First World War. International organization of women's cooperation was still very young: the first women's international organizations began to emerge at the turn of the century and during the First World War.

### **Women at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference**

After the First World War, representatives of governments gathered at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 to establish the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Representatives of women's international organizations were there to give their proposals regarding the Covenant of the League of Nations and in order to prevent the exclusion of women from the provisions and decisions.

In this context women founded the Inter-Allied Suffrage Conference (IASC), whose delegation received the right to participate in certain peace conference commissions. Provided with the chance to meet the representatives of 14 Allied Nations, the delegation immediately urged that women be given access to decision-making positions in the League of Nations. They also made proposals on issues they wished to be included in the programme of the newly-established League. They proposed that the League set out to promote universal suffrage in Member States, take measures to recognize the right of a woman married to a foreigner to keep her nationality, and work to abolish trafficking in women and children and state-supported prostitution. In addition, they called for the creation of an international education and health bureau, and the control and reduction of armaments.

Based on these proposals, the Covenant of the League of Nations declared that the Member States should promote humane conditions of labour for men, women and children as well as prevent trafficking

in women and children. It also included provisions that all positions in the League of Nations, including the secretariat, should be open equally to men and women.

At the same time, women from American and British trade unions were on the move when the constitution of the ILO was being drafted. Among other things, they called for an eight-hour working day, an end to child labour, support for social insurance, pensions and maternity benefits, equal pay for equal work for women and men, as well as minimum wages for housework. Their proposals were politely received but quickly shelved as too radical.

Nevertheless, women's efforts resulted in the inclusion of a reference to fair and humane conditions of labour for men, women and children in the International Labour Organization constitution (Galey, 1995). The work toward the other objectives has continued, although some goals have still not been achieved.

### **People's Organizations and Inter-Governmental Cooperation**

After the founding of the League of Nations and the ILO, representatives of women's organizations began to regularly observe the proceedings and work of the inter-governmental organizations and give their own proposals to government representatives. They founded the Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations, which became "the voice of women" in Geneva. Women's organizations campaigned throughout the 1920s and 1930s to ensure, among other things, that women and their rights would not be neglected. The League of Nations established a body for international legal protection of the human rights of particular minority groups.

This was the start of the dialogue between international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and the inter-governmental

organization (IGO) of the League of Nations. Forerunners in this dialogue, which later continued with the United Nations, included women's international organizations such as the International Council of Women (ICW), International Alliance of Women (IAW), International Cooperative Women's Guild (ICWG), International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW), International Federation of University Women (IFUW), World Young Women's Christian Association (WYWCA), and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). These were based mainly in Europe and the United States.

"While each type of organization clearly had distinct goals and priorities, they all believed that the League of Nations was an important vehicle for social and political reforms, in particular, the advancement of the status of women" (Miller, 1992). These organizations were estimated to represent 45 million women, but "a leadership cohort of middle and upper-class British, Scandinavian and American women who met on a regular basis in London or Geneva coordinated women's international work."

Encouraged by the founding of the ILO, American female trade unionists convened the first International Congress of Working Women in Washington DC in 1919, in collaboration with women from the European trade unions. The International Federation of Working Women (IFWW) was also founded at this conference, and decisions were reached regarding a united approach to women's questions at annual International Labour Conferences. The ILO's work toward the development of labour regulations had a brisk start, as early as the 1920s, with women participating intensively right from the beginning.

The activities of women's organizations during that time can be compared to the large-scale NGO conferences arranged in connection with recent UN world conferences. In Paris in 1919 a handful of newly-established women's international organizations arranged

the first parallel NGO conference to coincide with an inter-governmental conference. The aim of the parallel conference was to make women's voices heard in governmental discussions. It was not until 25 years later, at the founding of the UN, that some of the proposals made in 1919 by women reached the ears of the governments. Women's early proposals included international collaboration in fields such as education and health care; but the world had to wait until 1946 to see the UN establish the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to address these issues. Women also had clear demands regarding disarmament and arms control—issues that were to become fundamental elements of the UN's work from the outset.

In recent decades, parallel NGO conferences have become a permanent feature in connection with UN world conferences and gather thousands of people from around the world to monitor the inter-governmental events. These people's fora create massive publicity for issues that activists from around the world want to bring to the public's attention. NGO events parallel to UN conferences on women have attracted the greatest participation.

### **Latin American Women as Forerunners**

Latin American women were instrumental in the International Conference of American States decision in 1928 to create the Inter-American Commission of Women (IACW), the first inter-governmental body to address issues related to the status of women. The IACW prepared, and its member governments adopted, the Montevideo Convention on the Nationality of Married Women in 1933. This was the first inter-governmental convention providing women and men with equal status in respect to nationality. In 1935 the League of Nations approved the Convention and urged all Member States to ratify it.

The IACW also prepared the 1938 Declaration of Lima in Favor of Women's Rights. At this time the IACW encouraged its member governments to establish women's bureaux, revise discriminatory civil codes, and take women's initiatives regarding these issues to the League of Nations (Galey, 1995).

Perhaps the most concrete example of women's ability to make an impact at the international level was the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. Established by the League of Nations in 1937, it was authorized to conduct a "comprehensive and scientific inquiry into the legal status of women in various countries of the world." The Committee's work had barely begun when the Second World War broke out. But its founding was an important step toward putting women's human rights on the agenda of inter-governmental cooperation. The Committee was also the predecessor of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) later established by the United Nations.

### **Pacifist and Feminist Aims**

To summarize the relationship between women's organizations and the League of Nations, Carol Miller, researcher on gender issues, refers to two ground-breaking achievements.

First, women created a model for cooperation and interaction between non-governmental organizations and inter-governmental organizations. Formerly only Heads of State, foreign ministers and diplomats were entitled to participate in inter-governmental conferences. Women, however, demanded the right of access to meetings in the conference hall and to official documents, and the right to distribute their statements in the hall and interact with official delegates—literally to lobby. They were first granted these rights at the League of Nations World Disarmament Conference in 1932, and later at other meetings.

Second, through their well-prepared proposals and what were perceived as credible actions, women's international organizations were able to establish so-called women's issues on the agenda of international cooperation. In other words, issues related to the status of women became international issues, not purely domestic concerns. This principle was established at the League of Nations at a time when women in many Member States did not even enjoy political rights, and when women were not accepted as diplomats (Miller, 1995).

Although pacifist aims, disarmament and peace were important reasons women supported the League of Nations, Miller points out that feminist objectives—the essence of which was the legal recognition of women's equality—were clearly equally significant. From this perspective, the founding of the Committee of Experts mentioned above was in itself a victory. It showed that securing equality between women and men, and the status of women, were issues that could not be left to governments alone. These early days saw systematic work toward convincing the League of Nations to draw up and adopt an international equal rights convention.

These were the beginnings of the formulation of a “dialectic,” indirect and two-way strategy that has been used to advance women's objectives throughout the history of the United Nations. When women found it very slow or impossible to promote their objectives at the national level in their own countries, they took their issue to inter-governmental organizations. Such collaboration within these organizations has often resulted in resolutions and recommendations, even international conventions, that are more advanced than those adopted at national levels. These accepted inter-governmental instruments then have been used effectively by women to pressure their governments and legislators to adopt and implement compatible laws in their respective countries.

As British pacifist and feminist Vera Brittain said in the 1920s, “The time has now come to move from the national to the international

sphere, and to endeavour to obtain by international agreement what national legislation has failed to accomplish" (Miller, 1994).

The League of Nations' attitude toward women's activism was based on the realization that women were a valuable lobbying and support group for the League in almost every Member State. Women, on the other hand, saw the League as a new and powerful arena for advancing their objectives: peace, human rights and women's equality in all countries. Thus due to women's tenacious and clever diplomacy, the League of Nations was soon in advance of most of its Member States concerning women's issues.

## **THE FOUNDING MOTHERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

The existence of the League of Nations ended with the onset of the Second World War. In retrospect, however, the work carried out during its existence was not in vain.

History shows that the basis and models for inter-governmental cooperation created by the League of Nations formed a firm base on which to build a new inter-governmental peace organization, which was already being planned by the Allied Nations during the war. During the time of the League of Nations, models of cooperation between international NGOs and inter-governmental organizations were also created. Furthermore, so-called women's issues had gained visibility and began to appear more often on the international community's agenda.

Due to women's actions in the 1920s and 1930s, a substantial number gained experience and expertise in the international arena and networking. Women in official government delegations, representatives of women's organizations and women in significant positions in the League of Nations kept in touch with each other and acted in consort to further their common objectives.

Women's experience was also an indispensable asset when the founding conference of the United Nations was held in 1945 in San Francisco. Consequently, women were appointed to several of the government delegations participating in the conference. There were four Latin American women serving as delegates: Minerva Bernardino (Dominican Republic), Amália Caballero de Castillo Ledón (Mexico), Bertha Lutz (Brazil) and Isabel P. de Vidal (Uruguay). In addition, two women in the Venezuelan delegation, Lucila L. de Perez Diaz and Isabel Sanchez de Urdaneta, served as advisors. Other women delegates included Cora T. Casselman

(Canada), Jessie Street (Australia) and Wu Yi-Fang (China). The United States delegation had five women, with Virginia Gildersleeve as a delegate and the others as advisors. Ellen Wilkinson and Florence Horsbrugh were assistant delegates for the United Kingdom.

Four of the women delegates—Minerva Bernardino, Bertha Lutz, Wu Yi-Fang and Virginia Gildersleeve—were also among the 160 signatories of the UN Charter as representatives of their governments.

### **Dispute Over the Basic Concepts**

Many of these women had several overlapping mandates, which added weight to their contributions. Ms. Caballero de Castillo Ledón was the chair of the Inter-American Commission on Women mentioned above, and both Bertha Lutz and Minerva Bernardino were members. They were instrumental in the movement that demanded the Preamble to the UN Charter reaffirm not only nations' "faith in fundamental human rights" and "the dignity and worth of the human person," but in "the equal rights of men and women."

Consequently, this wording was incorporated into the Charter; later generations have regarded it to be of crucial importance since the Charter legitimized from the beginning demands for full equality and equal rights for women and men alike. The fact that four different Articles—1(3), 55, 68 and 76—in the Charter affirm that human rights and fundamental freedoms belong to all "without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion" gave strength to the initial wording.

Jessie Street, an Australian with the backing of a powerful network of women's organizations in her country and good connections with women from several other countries, made a strong impact in San

Francisco. She pushed for inclusion of an article in the Charter that corresponded to the stipulation in the Covenant of the League of Nations, which makes all positions in the United Nations equally open to men and women. The proposal was widely supported and was formulated as Article 8: "The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs."

Article 8 was incorporated into the final text of the Charter, although an attempt was made to remove it by those opposed to any special endorsement of women's eligibility. Women activists in those days regarded this Article as another highly significant achievement for the advancement of women. In the years thereafter, however, they must have felt disappointed when observing how the Article was ignored. Only during the past decade has it been given appropriate recognition, and the number of women in high positions in the UN system has been increasing rapidly (United Nations, 1999a).

The actual work of the United Nations began with an inaugural session of the General Assembly in London in early 1946. The issue of women's rights reappeared in the session as a prominent item on the international agenda for the first time since the beginning of the Second World War. Seventeen women participated in the session as delegates or advisers to delegations. They prepared a document entitled "An Open Letter to the Women of the World" (see Annex I), from the women delegates and advisers at the first Assembly of the United Nations. The letter introduced the UN to women as "the second attempt of the peoples of the world to live peacefully in a democratic world community." It called on women to take "an important opportunity and responsibility" in promoting these goals in the United Nations and their respective countries.

Ms. M. Lefauchaux of the French delegation initiated the letter, but it was delivered to the Assembly by a delegate of the United States,

Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt urged governments to take the letter home and encouraged women everywhere to come forward and “share in the work of peace and reconstruction as they did in war and resistance.” She expressed her conviction that the United Nations “can—if we give to it as much work as we have given in the past to winning the war—be an instrument to win the peace.”

This letter was the first formal articulation of women’s voices in the UN and an outline of the role for women to play in a new arena of international politics and cooperation. The letter was neither discussed, nor formally adopted. However, several delegates spoke about it or gave statements supporting it. The letter and the statements were recorded, with the hope expressed by the President of the session that the issue “will be taken into very serious consideration” (United Nations, 1995b, pages 93-98).

### **New Dimensions for the United Nations**

The UN Charter established three new substantive elements of crucial importance for women, which had not been features of the League of Nations.

1. In addition to political tasks, the UN was given the mandate “to promote economic and social progress and development.” One of the five principal organs, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), was established to be in charge of these operations. It was also mandated to establish subsidiary bodies (Articles 55-60 of the Charter), such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). And through ECOSOC, specialized agencies such as the ILO, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the World Health Organization (WHO) were linked with the UN system.

2. Concerning human rights, Article 55c said that “the UN shall promote universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.”

3. Concerning legitimization of the collaborative relationship between non-governmental organizations and the UN, Article 71 provides the framework within which NGOs can acquire consultative status with ECOSOC. This opportunity was utilized by, among others, all of the women’s international organizations that had been collaborating actively with the League of Nations.

The creation of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) under ECOSOC was another area requiring considerable struggle. Although, as previously mentioned, the CSW had a precedent in the League of Nations, contrary to wishes of women participating in the UN founding conference it was initially set up as a sub-commission of the Commission on Human Rights.

However, the first chair of the Sub-Commission on the Status of Women, Bodil Begtrup—President of the Danish National Council of Women and a former delegate to the League of Nations—did manage at the second session of ECOSOC to push through a resolution establishing the CSW as an autonomous entity. Therefore, despite failure to reach a decision on this in San Francisco in 1945, CSW was able to commence its operations as an autonomous Commission as early as 1947. Ms. Begtrup continued as the chair, and Jessie Street was elected as the first vice-chair of the Commission. The members included Ms. Caballero de Castillo Ledón and Ms. Urdaneta, who had been active members of their national delegations in San Francisco.

Why was it that women, right from the very beginning, persistently demanded a special Commission on the Status of Women instead of pursuing their cause through a sub-commission of the Commission

on Human Rights? Ms. Begtrup argued that women did not want to be dependent on the pace of another commission. They believed that through a commission of their own they could proceed more quickly than in the Commission of Human Rights, where their proposals would end up “in the queue” with many other human rights issues.

In fact, time has shown that in the independent Commission on the Status of Women, the proposals by women have gained a totally different weight and significance than would have been the case in the Commission on Human Rights. As an independent commission, CSW was entitled to set its own agenda, decide its priorities, and report and make proposals directly to ECOSOC.

John P. Humphrey, the first Director of the UN Secretariat Division of Human Rights, gives an interesting account of CSW in his memoirs: “[More] perhaps than any other United Nations body the delegates to the Commission on the Status of Women were personally committed to its objectives...[and] acted as a kind of lobby for the women of the world....There was no more independent body in the UN. Many governments had appointed...as their representatives women who were militants in their own countries” (Morsink, 1991).

Concerning the significance of the UN Charter to women, it “gave [them] slim, formal recognition, but the human rights provisions gave women constitutional-legal leverage to renew their quest for improvement of their status, achieve full citizenship with men, and enter the world’s political stage” (Galey, 1995).

### **Mission and Mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women**

In the years from 1946 to 1962, CSW focused on mapping out the legal status of women in the Member States and later on the preparation of legislation and international conventions for the advancement

of the status of women. The resources of the Commission were extremely small, and the assistance provided was limited to a Section on the Status of Women with a very small staff within the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Department of Social Affairs. The shortage of assistance was partly compensated by the motivation and enthusiasm of members of the Commission.

In the initial session, the Commission began to specify its mission and mandate. Its two basic functions are to "prepare recommendations and reports to the Economic and Social Council on promoting women's rights in the political, economic, civil and educational fields," and to make recommendations "on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights." The Commission also has the mandate to make proposals on the further development of its functions and mandate (E/RES/2/11, 21 June 1946).

The CSW, as part of the UN system, is by definition an inter-governmental institution. However, from the beginning it also has had direct contacts with women's international non-governmental organizations. They were the channel through which the Commission aspired to establish direct contact with the women of Member States. The women's international NGOs had already manifested their interest and resourcefulness when the Commission was being founded. Through the acquisition of consultative status granted by ECOSOC, representatives of these NGOs received the right to participate as observers at Commission sessions and have access to its reports and documents. Upon the Commission's approval, they could also address the sessions.

At its first session in February 1947, the Commission heard 12 women's international organizations. Most of these were organizations that had already established a relationship with the League of Nations and had been active at the United Nations founding conference. The Commission also expressed its willingness to collaborate

with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), American Federation of Labor, and the International Cooperative Alliance, although these were not women's organizations.

From the Commission's inception, women's international organizations have been very eager to attend its sessions and monitor its work. Many organizations have appointed permanent representatives to the Commission who have attended sessions over a long period of time and have acquired considerable expertise and vital personal contacts within the Commission and UN secretariat.

Getting proposals onto the Commission's agenda was often a difficult task for the different NGOs. However, it rapidly became clear how they could do so. Since only governments are official members of the Commission, they have the exclusive right to propose items for the Commission's agenda. NGO representatives who utilize their connections and negotiation skills, however, can persuade government delegations to adopt NGO proposals and submit them to the Commission. Over the years this is how countless issues have begun as NGO initiatives and ended up as UN resolutions and recommendations. Collaboration between representatives of NGOs and governments has been close and fruitful from the start, and official delegates often have been grateful for well-prepared proposals submitted by NGOs.

The mandate of the CSW was expanded by ECOSOC in 1987 (E/RES/1987/24) to include activities such as advocating equality, development and peace; monitoring the implementation of internationally-agreed measures for the advancement of women; and reviewing and appraising progress at the national, regional and international levels. This expansion was based on experiences and outcomes of the 1975 International Women's Year, the 1976-85 United Nations' Decade for Women and the 1985 Nairobi Conference.

## **Human Rights or “Rights of Man”?**

Activists and the CSW had a decisive role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights between 1946 and 1948. They wanted to make sure that the phrase “equal rights of men and women,” incorporated through great effort in the UN Charter, would not be watered down in the Declaration’s preamble. Minerva Bernardino<sup>1</sup> of the Dominican Republic questioned use of the term “everyone” in the preamble; she argued that “in certain countries the term ‘everyone’ did not necessarily mean every individual, regardless of sex.” In the end, Member States voted on whether the Declaration should reproduce the exact phrase contained in the preamble to the UN Charter. Thirty-two voted in favour, with only two against (China and the United States) and three abstentions.

Women monitored the drafting of the Declaration paragraph-by-paragraph in order to prevent the inclusion of any sexist phrases. It took extensive debate to erase the word “man” when referring to all people. In fact, it was during this time that the English word “man” was recognized as only meaning men. Women said the word represents gender, not species; it therefore excludes women. Thanks to the unyielding efforts of women during the Declaration drafting, Article 1 reads, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” instead of “All men...” And in place of “every man” and “no man,” the words “everyone” and “no one” are used throughout the text.

Another problem was the text’s use of the masculine pronouns “he,” “him” and “his,” which remained unsolved; the masculine pronouns are still in the text. In other languages that use gender-neutral

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1. Minerva Bernardino (1907-1998) was a delegate of the Dominican Republic to the UN founding conference in San Francisco in 1945 and her country’s first UN ambassador until 1957. Her positions included the Chair of CSW and First Vice President of ECOSOC. She was the only woman of those present at the UN founding conference who also took part in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the UN in 1995 in San Francisco.

pronouns, such as Finnish, this problem doesn't exist. In fact, the "universal" Declaration appears somewhat different in different translations. For example, in French it still includes wording such as *Droits de l'Homme* (Rights of Man) to signify "human rights."

Ms. Bernardino, who was interviewed by *INSTRAW News* in 1992 at the age of 85, said: "I am very proud to have been instrumental in changing the name of the Declaration of the 'Rights of Men' to the Declaration of Human Rights." She believed women who fought for this were "conscious that they were making a revolution." This revolution continued in the 1950s and included issues such as the right to live with dignity. "In interpreting these words," she said, "we denounced, in the United Nations, the horrible mutilations of women in certain religious/cultural rituals in certain regions in Africa. We started a job that has not yet ended. Women have not really worked in solidarity to end it." Ms. Bernardino placed emphasis on solidarity "because it is the key to success. Just causes in general always win, I am convinced, but without solidarity you do not achieve your specific goals."

In hindsight one can only imagine the kind of a document the Universal Declaration of Human Rights might have become had it been written solely by men—even though the drafting commission was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. The adoption of the Declaration by the General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 was a triumph and a defining moment for the CSW. Ever since, the Commission has used the Declaration as a basis for action for promoting equal rights and freedoms. At the United Nations, the Declaration is the basis for codifying human rights into well-known legally binding international conventions.

# HUMAN RIGHTS ARE WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The United Nations Blue Book<sup>2</sup> on the advancement of women divides UN work focused on equality and the advancement of women into four different periods: securing the legal foundations of equality (from 1945-1962); recognizing women's role in development (from 1963-1975); the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985); and "Towards Equality, Development and Peace" (from 1986 onwards).

## The Legal Status of Women in the World

The first task of CSW was to conduct a global survey on the status of women's rights, which the League of Nations had worked on a decade earlier. Seventy-four governments—including some that were not even members of the UN—responded promptly to the questionnaire. The survey revealed four areas of particular concern:

- political rights of women and the possibility to exercise them;
- legal rights of women, both as individuals and as family members;
- access of girls and women to education and training, including vocational training; and
- working life.

By 1962, several conventions focused on these issues had been prepared by the United Nations, UNESCO, and the ILO. The most significant of these included the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, the 1951 ILO Convention Concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, the 1952

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2. Volume VI of the United Nations *Blue Book Series* is entitled *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women 1945-1995*. This publication is a collection of the most important documents and resolutions on women in the United Nations during 1945-1995.

Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the 1957 Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, the 1960 UNESCO International Convention Against Discrimination in Education, and the 1962 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage, and Registration of Marriages.

The titles and realities behind these conventions are a sad reflection of the problems women faced in the first half of the 20th century. For example, in the 1940s only 30 of the 51 countries that had signed the UN Charter acknowledged political rights of women. (The number now stands at 155 countries.) Often if a marriage was not registered and hence legitimized, a wife had no security and could be abandoned at any time, thrown out of her home, and separated from her family without any economic or social support. For this reason the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages obliged Member States to create legislation to that effect.

### **The Right to Family Planning—A New Human Right**

As mentioned earlier, when women couldn't achieve their goals at the national level they took the issues to the international level. They have used this strategy in connection with the right to family planning, women's rights over their body and deciding on the number and spacing of their children. The family planning issue was not discussed when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drawn up. However, it has become a recognized basic human right, which has had a major impact on the advancement of women's status and their lives during the past century. Women's right and means to control their own fertility also improves the possibility of controlling their lives in general and realizing their other human rights. These include the right to education and training, to undertake economic activities of their own, and to participate in the political, cultural and social spheres in their countries.

The right to family planning is a “latecomer” when compared with women’s political and legal rights; as late as the 1960s it was still a fairly new issue around the world. However, it rapidly gained support within the women’s movement of the industrialized countries. The UN and some densely populated countries—with India in the forefront—began to take an interest because population growth was regarded more and more as a major problem. However, family planning was very controversial within the UN, where it was categorically opposed by many nations strongly influenced by Catholicism—led by the Holy See—and by Islamic countries.

The right to family planning was recognized for the first time as a human right in the 1968 Declaration of Teheran, which resulted from the International Conference on Human Rights. In the following year it was included in the Declaration on Social Progress and Development by the UN General Assembly. In the 1970s the issue was constantly debated at the General Assembly and in world conferences.

Countries opposing promotion of and education in family planning for women, as well as the provision of contraceptives, threatened to withdraw all support from agencies such as UNICEF and the UNFPA if they included family planning in their programmes.

Political controversy managed to slow down the process of promoting family planning, but not to bring it to a standstill. Women’s organizations and development agencies continued to support and demand it. Development aid organizations in the United States and politicians in particular regarded birth control in the developing countries as one of the most important forms of development aid. Women delegates to UN conferences and women’s NGOs created networks with UN organizations and kept the issue alive, while disputes in the General Assembly persisted. Women activists saw this as a major issue for women in general and not just for those from the developing countries.

The right to family planning became a major issue at the first UN World Population Conference in 1974. Very precise formulations on the issue were adopted by the 1975 World Conference of the International Women's Year (IWY) in Mexico. Its World Plan of Action and Declaration said that "every couple and every individual has the right to decide freely and responsibly whether or not to have children as well as to determine their number and spacing, and to have information, education and means to do so" (United Nations, 1975).

The right to family planning is more specifically defined in the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. It reaffirms this right as a binding obligation of the Member States. In the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, the concepts of "reproductive rights and reproductive health" were defined and adopted. These new formulations expanded understanding of the issue.

According to the Cairo Programme of Action (United Nations, 1994), "Reproductive health implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this are the rights of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice" (paragraphs 7.2 and 7.3). Reproductive health and rights received even more precise and extensive formulation in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which reconfirms the definitions formulated in Cairo (paragraphs 94-96).

A heated discussion took place in Beijing on the concept of "sexual rights," which was supposed to cover all of the above in addition to the issue of various sexual orientations. Although the concept was not acceptable to many countries and was not adopted, the essential content—as formulated in Cairo and further developed in Beijing—was finally adopted by consensus. However, 12 Catholic countries,

the Holy See and 19 Islamic countries expressed their reservations to paragraphs related to this issue in the final document.

With the right to family planning, another basic human right becomes a reality: the right to be born a wanted child. It is easy to understand how infinitely important this is as a fundamental human right at the beginning of a new life. A recent study in Finland has shed light on the physical and practical importance of this; for example, the risk of being born prematurely is lower with children wanted by their parents, they are breastfed longer than unwanted children and have fewer health problems later. The study also reveals that in 1966, 12% of children were born unwanted in Finland whereas in 1988 the corresponding figure had dropped to 1%, with the number of premature babies also dropping by half during the same period (Järvelin, 1997).

In practice, the right and access to family planning is an asset for entire families—men, women and children—the world over. It is important even from an economic point of view because it helps families to plan better to provide nourishment, care, housing and education for their children.

When policies promoting reproductive health and rights are implemented, even controversial issues such as abortion and teenage pregnancy become easier to address. Abortion has been legal since 1970 in Finland, and at the same time education and family planning services have been greatly improved. In the meantime teenage and unwanted pregnancies have greatly decreased. In the beginning of the 1970s the number of legal abortions increased but then began to decline due to the fall of unwanted pregnancies. The abortion rate in Finland is now one of the lowest in the world: in 1973 there were 41 abortions for every 100 live births, and in 1993 this had dropped to 15 (Finnish Government, 1994).

The right to family planning is an excellent example of an issue fought for on many fronts over decades. From 1968 onwards it was brought

up in every relevant context at UN conferences and in resolutions—despite often forceful protest. Debate over the issue quickly gained prominence in, among other things, national and international media, women's magazines and development aid publications.

Women's reproductive rights were still hotly debated at the Beijing Conference in 1995, and at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Beijing+5 in June 2000.

Progress on this issue could not have been achieved without women's collaboration, despite borders separating them and government opposition. Nevertheless, the struggle to achieve implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women continues, even in countries that have ratified it. However, the Convention and Plans of Action of recent UN world conferences have proved indispensable tools for women's efforts to press governments for implementation.

### **Convention on the Rights of Women**

From women's point of view, the single most important international legal instrument adopted by the UN is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, also known as the Convention on the Rights of Women.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the Convention does not imply any specific women's rights but is a reflection of the reality that universally-recognized human

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3. The significance of an international convention lies in the fact that it reinforces a universally-adopted legal norm on the issue concerned. Among other things it provides an indisputable justification for the efforts of NGOs, women's movements and legislators when they work toward exposing human rights violations and call for rectification in their respective countries. An international convention also provides indisputable grounds for demanding that the Convention be ratified, and that corresponding national legislation to remedy the grievances be created by governments. Without an internationally adopted framework, the work toward the advancement of women's legal and social status would be even more difficult than it is today in many countries.

rights are still not enjoyed equally by women and men. If they were, no convention on the elimination of discrimination against women would be needed. The very necessity of this Convention is revealing and paradoxical, and it bears witness to continuing discrimination.

The predecessor of the Convention was the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which was initiated by CSW in 1963. This was the beginning of a process similar to those of many other UN conventions wherein the first step was the preparation of a Declaration, which only offered recommendations. The Declaration was adopted in 1967.

The long process of preparing the Convention started in 1973 (see Annex II). After it was adopted by the General Assembly in 1979, it was to become binding for the countries that ratified it. Processes such as this often help in the development and maturation of the views and positions of decision makers in the UN and Member States alike towards acceptance of previously controversial issues, despite the occasional need for fundamental changes in values and legislation. They can also help shape public opinion worldwide.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women incorporates the principles of women's rights and gender equality into international law. It includes all provisions aimed at the elimination of discrimination against women previously covered by separate conventions. It also contains provisions covering issues that had been omitted from earlier conventions. The Convention recognizes the right to family planning as one of the basic human rights.

The Convention was unanimously adopted in 1979 and entered into force two years later following ratification by the required 20 governments. Ratified by 165 governments by March 2000, the Convention has become one of the most widely-ratified UN human rights conventions. Although this does not necessarily guarantee implementation in all countries, it provides an invaluable instrument for women

everywhere as they work toward the development of national legislation and the elimination of discrimination against them.

In addition, the Convention provides for follow-up by the UN regarding practical implementation in Member States. It calls for the establishment of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which States Parties to the Convention are obliged to report on progress of implementation every four years. CEDAW also has the right to invite governments individually to a hearing about their measures toward implementation of the provisions.

Furthermore, in October 1999 the General Assembly endorsed an Optional Protocol to the Convention. It provides CEDAW with the mandate to hear petitions and complaints of individual citizens, groups of individuals and concerned NGOs about violations of the Convention. In practice this Protocol enables women victims of gender discrimination to submit complaints to an international treaty body. The Protocol entered into force in December 2000 after ten States had ratified it. Upon entry into force, it put the Convention on an equal footing with other international human rights instruments that have individual complaints mechanisms.

CEDAW is composed of 23 experts of high moral standing and competence nominated by States that have ratified the Convention and elected by States Parties for a term of four years. Members of the Committee serve in their personal capacity and not as representatives of their governments.

The governments of some countries also consult representatives of women's organizations and arrange hearings as part of the preparation of their report to CEDAW before submitting it. Women's organizations can also send CEDAW "shadow reports" about their government's actions toward implementation of the Convention.

## **The Missing Link in the Chain**

During the past ten years, greater awareness of a missing link in progress on women's rights within the UN system has emerged: violence against women. When the Convention on the Rights of Women was being prepared, this issue was overlooked both in the UN and elsewhere. Consequently, the Convention does not include a single mention of it.

However, since the 1985 Nairobi Conference to review and appraise achievements of the UN Decade for Women, the UN has encouraged discussion to help break the silence concerning the issue of violence against women. In 1993 the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women after a long and thorough preparation process directed by CSW. This Declaration may have been yet another first step towards the preparation of a binding Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, as suggested by the then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his message on International Women's Day in 1995 (United Nations, 1996a).

In 1994 the Organization of American States (OAS) had already adopted the Inter-American Convention on Violence Against Women (known as the Convention of Belem do Para). It entered into effect in 1995 and presently has 29 ratifications by a total of 35 OAS Member States. This was possible because the OAS has a capacity to develop treaties—which could serve as an example to other regional organizations including the Council of Europe.

The decisive impetus toward making further progress on this issue was provided by the Beijing Platform for Action. One of the Platform's key objectives is "the elimination of all forms of violence against women." As many as three of the 12 strategic objectives of the Platform of Action are directly connected to the elimination of violence against women and girls, and include violence against women,

women and armed conflict, and the girl-child. The importance of detecting and eliminating economic, structural, social and cultural violence against women runs throughout the Platform for Action.

As part of the process to implement the Platform for Action, four conferences in 1997 dealt with violence against women from a new viewpoint. The Swedish government held a conference on the subject in Stockholm; the Council of Europe held a seminar in Strasbourg (France); the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) held a conference on domestic violence in Latin America and the Caribbean in Washington DC (USA); and UNESCO held an Expert Group Meeting on Male Roles and Masculinity in the Perspective of a Culture of Peace (Pietilä, 1997) in Oslo (Norway).

These conferences examined violence against women as “a male problem,” as part of the male culture and its consequences to men themselves and society in whole. Since then, men’s movements—such as the White Ribbon and others—have grown in their work against male violence in general, and violence against women in particular, in an increasing number of countries such as Canada, Namibia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States, and the Nordic and South-East Asian countries. Also, current research is gradually spreading and analysing the role of men and masculinity as women’s research has worked on preconceived women’s roles in various cultures.

The movements and research also aim to promote a culture of peace where violence is rare, and recognize that this requires the involvement of both men and women. As a culmination of the recommendations and conclusions reached by these conferences, the UN General Assembly unanimously declared in November 1997 that the year 2000 would be the International Year for the Culture of Peace. Furthermore, the years 2001-2010 have been proclaimed by the UN as the International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence.

## **THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN (1976-1985): A DECADE OF DEVELOPMENT**

A critical change in thinking at the UN secretariat and among Member States concerning the status of women and attitudes toward them began in the early 1970s. Until then women were seen as “objects” of support and measures. However, people began realizing that women had a central, even critical role as subjects and actors in relation to many development goals and aspirations.

### **New Trends with New States in the UN**

As the proportion of developing countries grew among UN Member States, development issues became increasingly prominent on the UN’s agenda. As early as the 1960s, developing countries began attempting to shift the focus of debate in the UN from political and security issues to development issues. The world food situation was again critical in the early 1970s, and there was general agreement that something had to be done about population growth. These problems made the UN system realize that women were the key factor in their solution. Unless the situation of women was addressed and their status and conditions improved, there would be no hope for alleviating food and population problems. Thus the hard reality of the world’s situation brought women into the spotlight.

At the same time, the feminist movement was growing stronger and becoming very active in the industrialized countries. The excitement generated by a new discipline, women’s studies, brought the status of women and their thinking into public discussion. This was also reflected in the United Nations. Kurt Waldheim, appointed United Nations Secretary-General in 1971,

faced demands from many quarters to increase the proportion of women in the secretariat and in senior positions. The UN, approaching its 30th anniversary at the time, still did not have even one single woman in a high-level position.

For several years the Commission on the Status of Women had tried to transfer attention from the conference tables of New York and Geneva to women in the villages and fields of the South. However, the first International Development Strategy, adopted for the Second International Development Decade of 1970-1980, only included a minor clause about women. CSW's impressive "countermove" was to propose to the General Assembly a comprehensive resolution outlining "a programme of concerted international action for the advancement of women," to be implemented during the Decade. The resolution (A/RES/2715 XXV) was unanimously adopted on 15 December 1970.

In early 1972, the Secretary-General appointed Helvi Sipilä from Finland as the first female UN Assistant Secretary-General. In the same year the General Assembly declared the year 1975 as International Women's Year, with the objective of focusing attention on the status of women both within the UN system and in the Member States. In addition, two years later in 1974 a decision was made to organize the World Conference of the International Women's Year, to be held in Mexico City in 1975. All these decisions and events set off an avalanche of activities and consciousness-raising about women's issues.

### **1975 International Women's Year as an Engine for Change**

The International Women's Year (IWY) is an example of how an NGO initiative was taken up by the UN and resulted in a massive mobilization process.

In the early 1970s, the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), led by its president Hertta Kuusinen from Finland, actively utilized its consultative status in the CSW. Ms. Kuusinen also represented her organization as an observer at the CSW, and brought to the March 1972 session of the Commission a WIDF proposal for proclamation of an "International Women's Year." The aim of the Year would be to bring the needs and views of women to the attention of the UN system and the world.

The proposal was backed by other NGO observers, and the Romanian delegate, with the support of her government, presented it to the Commission. Helvi Sipilä, the Finnish government representative at that time, seconded the proposal. Thus the Commission recommended to the General Assembly the proclamation of 1975 as International Women's Year. The General Assembly adopted the recommendation in December 1972.

IWY was just one in a series of UN theme years, most of which had hardly been noticed. The General Assembly adopted IWY with scepticism and reluctance, but women and women's organizations welcomed it with enthusiasm. It came at a time when many other factors were converging in the same direction: finally women's problems had to be considered, and their role in the development of every country recognized. IWY became a framework within which these issues could be the object of global attention and, at the same time, it highlighted previously ignored aspects of many issues in a way in which they could not be forgotten or denied. The success of IWY exceeded all expectations, and it made the world's women more aware than ever of the existence and potential of the UN system for advancement of their aims and aspirations.

IWY provided the UN with a framework within which women's needs and views could be promoted. It proved an excellent tool

with which the newly appointed UN Assistant Secretary-General Helvi Sipilä could justify in every possible context measures designed to promote the advancement of women. It also provided NGOs, operating within and outside the UN system, with an excellent additional impetus to their efforts on behalf of women the world over.

IWY, in fact, had significant influence before it even started. The preparations for two important UN world conferences were already well underway when the decision about IWY was taken. These were the World Population Conference to be held in Bucharest (Romania), and the World Food Conference to be held in Rome (Italy), both in 1974. These were focused on two key issues from the point of view of women: population and food.

When Helvi Sipilä became involved in 1972 with preparations for the World Population Conference, she worked to convince the preparatory committee that no population policy could be effective without the involvement of women. An unofficial preparatory meeting was organized, to which she invited one prominent woman from each Member State; 116 women attended the meeting. It aimed to ensure that government delegations to the World Population Conference would include women who would see to it that their crucial role in population issues would get due consideration in conference proceedings.

Preparations for the World Food Conference were at an advanced stage at the FAO when the proclamation on IWY was adopted. FAO already had a section on household and nutrition that was well aware of the vital role of women in food production, especially in Africa. With the World Food Conference approaching, NGOs—including the International Peace Research Association's Food Policy Study Group—arranged a meeting in Rome, which succeeded in influencing the official conference. As a consequence, the conference adopted an extensive and comprehensive resolution on Women and Food,

which indicated how women could contribute to the improvement of food supplies if they had better access to land, education, technology and funding.

Most of the 11 other world conferences on major issues organized by the UN in the 1970s did not take women into account as well. On the contrary, it was by chance if women's voices were heard in the "male enclaves" of these conferences, which aimed to assess and draw up long-term action plans for the key problem areas of development (Palmer, 1980).

The primarily male delegations did not address women's contributions and needs, even when they were provided with excellent background material. A case in point was the Water Conference held in Mar del Plata (Argentina) in 1977. Both the UN secretariat and the FAO had prepared outstanding documents proving in many countries that women were the only existing "water supply system" and literally carried the water required by their villages for drinking, cleaning and irrigation, often from distant locations. The final documents adopted by the conference did not include a word about women's crucial role in water procurement.

A decisive influence on the outcome of the conferences in the 1970s was whether or not a delegation happened to include an informed woman who would take the initiative—preferably beforehand during her government's preparation process—and get women's issues to the discussion table. As a member of a delegation, even a single woman could be in a position to prepare a draft resolution or amendment to conference papers on women's concerns and persuade her delegation to introduce it in the conference. For NGOs participating in parallel conferences, on the other hand, making an impact on the official conference proceedings on the spot was very difficult or almost impossible (Pietilä and Vickers, 1996).

## **The UN World Conferences on Women in 1975, 1980 and 1985**

The UN world conferences for the advancement of women in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) were part and parcel of a series of 20 major UN conferences organized in the 1970s and 1980s. However, each conference focusing on women was unique in character.

The 1975 World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City was the first-ever global inter-governmental conference specifically organized to address women's issues and world problems from women's perspectives. Even though it could not be called a women's conference—since official participants were government representatives—it was still the first major UN event in which a vast majority (73%) of the 1,200 delegates were women. In addition, 113 of the total of 133 delegations were headed by a woman. However, the proportion of men (27%) among the delegates was higher than the usual proportion of women at other UN conferences at that time!

The World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of International Women's Year adopted by the conference was intended as a programme for the advancement of women to be implemented during the forthcoming decade in all areas and all countries. It crystallized the past and present long-term objectives of the women's movement under the theme Equality—Development—Peace. This became the overall theme of the UN Decade for Women and all other world conferences on women afterwards. From the beginning, these objectives were considered interrelated and mutually-reinforcing, such that the advancement of one contributes to the advancement of the others. This concept is emphasized throughout the document adopted by the conference in Mexico City (United Nations, 1976).

The General Assembly, endorsing the Declaration of Mexico and the World Plan of Action, proclaimed the years 1976-1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women. The objectives of the Decade were set out in the World Plan of Action. It also decided to hold a mid-decade conference in Copenhagen (Denmark) in 1980 to review and appraise achievements during the first five years, and to specify the objectives for the remainder of the Decade.

The experiences gained, obstacles encountered and results achieved during the entire UN Decade for Women were thoroughly assessed and evaluated in Nairobi in 1985 at the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. The evaluation showed that the objectives set forth in Mexico had not been achieved during the Decade, but that plenty of other significant results had been attained.

One of the major achievements was that the situation of the world's women was "mapped out" better than ever before. During the Decade the UN system collected an enormous amount of information, facts and figures on the lives, problems and conditions of women in different countries. However, this highlighted the problem that, as a rule, national and international statistics did not provide gender-disaggregated data. Thus it was impossible to get a real picture of the disparities between men and women. Therefore, the UN requested Member States to review their statistics and provide the UN with data disaggregated by sex. In this way the scale of inequality and discrimination would become more visible and women's contributions to society better acknowledged. The "invisibilities" of women's lives were beginning to become visible.

Another great step forward during the UN Decade for Women was that the very concept of "development" came under scrutiny from the point of view of women. Before the Nairobi Conference, two

comprehensive surveys on development had been produced. The General Assembly decided in 1981 that an interdisciplinary and multisectoral world survey should be prepared on the role of women in overall development.

An alternative report on development was produced by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) about a year before the Nairobi Conference. This group was established and convened in Bangalore (India) in August 1984 on the invitation of Devaki Jain, a well-known development economist and thinker from India. The group of researchers and activists from the South brought together their experiences with development strategies, policies, theories and research. Their point of departure was the awareness "of the need to question in a more fundamental way the underlying processes of development into which we have been attempting to integrate women" (Sen and Grown, 1985).

The survey and alternative report were produced parallel to each other. The DAWN report on *Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions* is critical in a straight-forward manner. The *UN World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* is more diplomatic and subtle. However, the publications' findings support each other, and their basic message is the same: development is not serving the needs of women and does not correspond to women's values and aspirations.

These reports became important background documents for the 1985 Nairobi Conference. They also represented a turning point in dealing with women's issues in the UN system. They brought the role of women in development into focus as an indispensable new dimension and questioned the prevailing pattern of development from the point of view of women.

In 1985 when the General Assembly endorsed the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (NFLS), it also

decided that world surveys on the role of women in development would be prepared every five years as part of the follow-up of the Nairobi Conference.

In general, attitudes toward women began to change both within the UN system and the Member States as a result of the UN Decade for Women. A manifestation of this was the fact that the NFLS were adopted by consensus by 157 Member States (United Nations, 1985), whereas earlier conferences had resorted to a vote. A final document adopted by consensus is always more binding to governments than one based on a majority vote.

Even though the objectives of the UN Decade for Women had not been achieved in ten years, setting new objectives was not deemed necessary. Instead, the NFLS document included new, improved strategies for the attainment of the goals of the UN Decade for Women by the year 2000. Thus the UN Decade for Women “continued” in a way, until the year 2000.

### **INSTRAW and UNIFEM Emerge out of the Mexico Conference**

Until the 1970s there was only one small unit within the UN system focusing on women's interests and needs: the Branch for the Advancement of Women, which later evolved into the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). During the conference in Mexico City, this situation was considered inadequate for maintaining the momentum created around the world by the International Women's Year and the conference. Delegates stressed the need to strengthen the institutional structures devoted to women within the UN system.

The delegates called for the establishment of a special fund for the 1976-1985 decade, which then became the Voluntary Fund for the

UN Decade for Women. This initiative was thought to have promising prospects for funding. First, it appeared there would be some money left over in the IWY Trust Fund, which had been created through voluntary contributions from Member States for financing the IWY and the Mexico Conference. Delegates were also encouraged by several pledges made at the conference, including US\$1 million by Iran for the Fund and other purposes, and US\$1 million for the International Research and Training Institute for Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), which was to be established in Teheran (Iran).

After a series of complicated procedures, the Voluntary Fund for the UN Decade for Women was officially established in 1976 to give support to "the poorest women in the poorest countries" in their efforts to implement the goals of the World Plan of Action. When the Decade ended in 1985, the mandate of the Fund was expanded to become the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), a separate and identifiable entity within the UN system in autonomous association with the United Nations Development Programme. UNIFEM had three primary objectives: to provide direct support for women's projects, promote women's participation in the decision making of mainstream development programmes, and support the economic and social objectives and equality of women in the developing world (Snyder, 1995).

In addition to governments' voluntary contributions, women in different countries have also raised funds for the work of UNIFEM. This activity has been formalized by the establishment of UNIFEM National Committees to raise funds and disseminate information about UNIFEM's work. These committees now exist in 18 countries.

The formal decision to establish INSTRAW was made by ECOSOC (resolution 1998 LX of 12 May 1976). Due to the

political developments in Iran, the plan to locate the Institute in Teheran did not materialize.<sup>4</sup> The Institute initiated operations in New York in the beginning of the 1980s and finally established its permanent headquarters in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) in 1983.

INSTRAW, according to its Statute, is an autonomous institution within the United Nations system, and its activities cover all Member States of the UN, both industrialized as well as developing countries. INSTRAW is funded exclusively through voluntary contributions from Member States, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, foundations and private sources. It is not entitled to financing through regular contributions of UN Member States, which is the method of funding of other UN agencies; nor is it funded by an endowment, as is the case with some other UN research institutions.

These ambiguities in its financing have hampered INSTRAW in reaching the scope and role it was originally to have had. For this reason, a new plan for the revitalization and strengthening of INSTRAW was adopted by the General Assembly in November 1999. Thus INSTRAW is aiming to undertake a new strategic role within the UN system as the first institution primarily using new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

An essential part of this plan is the Gender Awareness Information and Networking System (GAINS), an integrated knowledge and information management system through Internet ([www.un-instraw-gains.org](http://www.un-instraw-gains.org)). The aim of GAINS is to create an effective network of national and international research institutions and individuals to facilitate the availability of gender-related and awareness-raising knowledge and information, which is presently fragmented and under-utilized by the UN and Member States.

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4. The contribution pledged by Iran, however, was made available to the Trust Fund of the Institute.

Today the work and resources of institutions working on gender issues within the UN system, such as DAW, INSTRAW and UNIFEM, have to be seen against the obligation undertaken by the UN system to mainstream a gender perspective into all policies and programmes. The latest and most far-reaching decision in this respect was made by ECOSOC in July 1997 when agreeing conclusions on "Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system" (ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions, 1997/2).

These ECOSOC Conclusions imply that the whole UN system should be involved and obligated in gender mainstreaming, and give detailed guidance on how the gender units and focal points—DAW, UNIFEM, INSTRAW and the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality—should support and give their expertise to all other entities of the UN system for this implementation. Under the title "Integrated follow-up of major United Nations conferences" ECOSOC will annually monitor the implementation of this obligation.

### **Women's World Conferences**

The parallel NGO fora held in connection with major UN conferences on women have become the "real" world conferences of participating women. From the first one in 1975, these parallel events consisting of NGOs—mainly women's organizations, researchers and activists in the women's movement—took on proportions never seen in NGO events held in connection with other UN conferences. The International Women's Year Tribune organized in Mexico City in 1975 had approximately 4,000 participants, while the official conference had about 1,200 delegates. The 1980 NGO Forum in Copenhagen brought together some 7,000 participants, and the 1985 Nairobi Forum broke all records by bringing together 16,000 people. And the number of

participants in the Beijing Conference and Huairou forum reached 50,000.<sup>5</sup>

The programmes of parallel events at NGO forums are drawn up by NGOs and participating groups themselves. They include seminars, lectures, workshops, exhibitions and even theatre, concerts and other artistic performances. An international planning committee is usually formed to make arrangements for facilities and locations for the suggested events, and it organizes some large-scale plenary gatherings. Massive events like this are also characterized by a constant flow of improvised meetings, events, demonstrations and processions.

For example, some 125 workshops and meetings were scheduled each day at the 1985 Nairobi Forum—about 1,200 altogether in ten days—and there was a constant flow of unplanned gatherings, discussions and group meetings of all kinds. At the Nairobi Forum networks were sown on the green lawns of the Nairobi University campus under the trees, in the Peace Tent, and in hotels and dormitories; no one knows the total extent of such activities.

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5. NGO forums in connection with major UN conferences became common in the 1970s. The first large parallel conference was held in connection with the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (UNCHE) in Stockholm in 1972. There was great interest among women both at international and national levels in UN world conferences on women. Under the auspices of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with ECOSOC (CONGO, now known as the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations), a special planning and preparatory committee was established to organize and prepare, at the international level, participation of NGOs in the conferences on women. Preparatory committees were established in each host country (Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi) in collaboration with local NGOs, which had the task of making practical arrangements.

NGOs wishing to observe and participate in UN processes and fora can apply to ECOSOC for Consultative Status. NGOs can also get accredited as observers to UN world conferences. In this way they gain access to the official documents and the conference sessions. This method of participation has been available to NGOs since the founding of the UN.

What distinguishes women's NGO fora is the enthusiasm of participants. The events are characterized by women actively organizing, participating, presenting, discussing and also singing, dancing and performing. They don't just passively sit and listen as is generally the case in so many conferences. Participants are all natural "experts" on being women, and on women's lives in their own countries. Therefore the exchange of information and experiences is easy, and all are also interested in sharing the knowledge presented by researchers on women's conditions and lives from all over the world. It is at these fora that the separation of theory and practice is eliminated, as both contribute to the enrichment of the total experience.

At the Nairobi Forum the strength and dignity of African women made an unforgettable impression upon Europeans, who for centuries had consented to being "only women." African women's visible self-confidence and determination proved that they are not the "second sex" but the first one in their own world. The Nairobi Forum was also the first of these large conferences where the proportion of participants from different parts of the world was becoming more balanced. There were so many women from Asia and Africa, and their contribution was so impressive, that white Western women were no longer dominant.

However, NGO fora are not merely one big celebration. It was apparent in Nairobi that the experiences gained in Mexico City and Copenhagen had taught women a great deal about influencing inter-governmental conferences. In many countries women had been active beforehand, lobbying their governments and giving suggestions to inter-governmental bodies. They had learned that it is extremely difficult to influence inter-governmental decisions on the spot during a world conference and knew, therefore, that this work had to be done beforehand in each country.

Women's ability to communicate is crucial to the success of their efforts. The better NGOs prepare their initiatives and tactics in

collaboration and across borders, the larger the number of governments their suggestions can reach. Nevertheless, it is also important to be present at the conference itself, in order to monitor and witness progress of the official proceedings. Events and discussions at NGO fora can also have an indirect impact on the official UN conferences.

At the Nairobi Forum, there was an awareness that such events of women should also be organized independently and irrespectively of the inter-governmental conference. This idea, while at that time only a dream in the minds of many participants, started to evolve. In 1987 a World Congress of Women was organized in Moscow by the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). It brought together more than 3,000 women from all over the world and revived the spirit seen in Nairobi. A Nordic Women's Forum, organized by Nordic women's organizations in 1988 in collaboration with the Nordic Council of Ministers and their governments in Oslo, was attended by some 10,000 women. Women from the region as well as other parts of the world participated. There have also been smaller events such as the International Interdisciplinary Congresses on Women, which is held every three years in a different part of the world.

The impetus behind all these events is the international women's movement, which is influencing and mobilizing greater numbers of women. In many countries it is nourished by women's research, which builds awareness and provides new information and indisputable arguments for women when trying to make women's "invisible" world visible to all.

### **The United Nations Decade for Women Changed the World**

The UN Decade for Women in 1976-1985 was the most successful to date of all such theme decades. The time was ripe for it. The

process that began to mature in the early 1970s became concrete in Mexico City in 1975, underwent mid-term stocktaking in Copenhagen in 1980, and was established as an acknowledged part of the UN operational agenda in Nairobi in 1985.

Much took place during and due to the UN Decade for Women. Women's awareness and self-confidence increased everywhere. At the world conferences women had also reached out to each other across borders; global sisterhood was becoming a reality, and at home it was passed on to those who were not present at the international events.

Women's contribution to development and their own advancement was addressed in the UN Development Strategies for the Third and Fourth Development Decades, in the 1980s and 1990s. These were also recognized in the world conferences on women, and in other major UN conferences such as the resolution on Women and Industrialization (ID/CONF.4/RES.1) of the Third General Conference of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in New Delhi (India) in 1980. A decisive change had taken place in the tone and approach in UN debates and in documents addressing women's issues.

As already mentioned, women were seen as objects whose legal status and situation needed to be improved in a paternalistic manner in the early years of the UN. The 1970s brought into discussions the potential contribution of women to development efforts in each country. The phrase "integration of women into development" was adopted, and women were seen as a resource that should be used more effectively. For this purpose it was necessary to improve not only their status, but also their nutrition, health and training.

However, in a way, women were still seen as instruments for development, and it was even claimed to be "a waste of human resources" if women were not fully integrated into the so-called development

efforts. The human rights and dignity of women were not yet seen as a value in their own right. Then a trend toward seeing women as equals, "as agents and beneficiaries in all sectors and at all levels of the development process," finally emerged in the International Development Strategy for the Third Development Decade of the UN in the 1980s.

The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies represented in many ways a turning point concerning the history of women in the UN. The NFLS recognize women as "intellectuals, policy-makers, decision-makers, planners and contributors, and beneficiaries of development" and obligates both Member States and the UN system to take this into consideration in policy and practice. The essential principle of the NFLS is formulated in paragraph 16, which explains the meaning of what is described as women's perspective.

"The need for women's perspective on human development is critical, since it is in the interest of human enrichment and progress to introduce and weave into the social fabric women's concept of equality, their choices between alternative development strategies and their approach to peace, in accordance with their aspirations, interests and talents. These things are not only desirable in themselves but are also essential for the attainment of the goals and objectives of the Decade."

Since the 1980s, UN reports, programmes and resolutions have begun to reflect recognition and understanding of the fact that women's equitable participation in all walks of life is no longer only their legitimate right; it is also a social and political necessity in making progress towards a more humane and sustainable future.



## ALL ISSUES ARE WOMEN'S ISSUES

Women's enthusiastic participation in the parallel events to UN world conferences shows how active and interested they are around the world in issues such as equality and peace. This also demonstrates the expectations and faith women place in the potential of the United Nations. However, as described earlier, it has often been a matter of chance if women's voices were articulated and heard at inter-governmental conferences in the 1970s and 1980s, when international networks did not exist to systematically ensure their voices were heard.

However, the NFLS represents the view that there are no specific women's issues; instead, all issues in the world are also women's issues. Women have the right to participate equally in the management of, and decision making about, all human affairs. A general understanding emerged that women were entitled to voice their views and impact all human issues whenever their lives and future were at stake. Women wish to influence how all issues are handled—not just women's issues—within the UN system and at its world conferences.

### Women for a Healthy Planet

In late 1989 it was decided that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or the Earth Summit, would be held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)—20 years after the first UN Conference on Human Environment in 1972 in Stockholm. The report *Our Common Future*, compiled by the Independent Commission on Environment and Development and chaired by then Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland, was used as a conceptual and political basis for the Earth Summit. Environmental issues had been on the UN agenda since the Stockholm Conference,

but women were seldom taken into account in connection with these, and their participation in debates on the use of natural resources and environmental protection was rare.

Environmental problems in developing countries were concrete, everyday issues that women had been dealing with for some time. In the US women regarded pollution and environmental degradation as the cause of many problems including women's health problems, especially increases in breast cancer. This is one of the reasons that ecological issues were often addressed in feminist agendas and in women's studies programmes. In contrast, eco-feminist thinking in Europe and the Nordic countries is rare, and there aren't any significant women's environmental movements.

The Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), established in the United States in 1990 with former US Congresswoman Bella Abzug as the leading figure, focused on environmental issues right from the beginning.<sup>6</sup> Early in the 1990s WEDO called on women from all over the world to follow preparations for the Earth Summit. From the start the WEDO international task force was present at every single preparatory committee session.

In November 1991, approximately six months before the Earth Summit, WEDO organized the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, held in Miami (United States). Attended by 1,500 women from 83 countries, this was the largest unofficial meeting held prior to the Earth Summit. The Congress adopted Women's Action Agenda 21 (directly related to the main document prepared

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6. WEDO started in 1990 as an International Policy Action Committee of 54 women, with almost half of its members from developing countries, nine from Europe and the rest from Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. Along with Bella Abzug, initiators were women who had been involved in organizing the NGO Forums in Mexico and Nairobi. They included Rosalind Wright Harris, Dorothy Slater Brown, Virginia Hazzard, Margaret Snyder and Catherine Tinker. The Women's Caucus network created by WEDO then mobilized hundreds of activities all over the world.

for the Earth Summit, which was entitled Agenda 21 or Agenda for the 21st Century). The Congress text formed the basis for women's efforts to influence UNCED documents in Rio.

The Preamble of Women's Action Agenda 21 declared clear points of departure for women's actions on the environment.

"As caring women, we speak on behalf of those who could not be with us, the millions of women who experience daily the violence of environmental degradation, poverty, and exploitation of their work and bodies. As long as Nature and women are abused by so-called 'free market' ideology and wrong concepts of 'economic growth' there can be no environmental security."

"We equate lack of political and individual will among world leaders with a lack of basic morality and spiritual values and an absence of responsibility towards future generations."

"We will no longer tolerate the enormous role played by the military establishment and industries in making the 20th century the bloodiest and most violent in all of human history. Militarism is impoverishing and maiming both the Earth and humanity."

### **An Infallible Strategy**

Drawing from her experience in the US Congress and as a skilled lawyer, Bella Abzug founded the Women's Caucus within WEDO; it was first "tested" in the Earth Summit preparatory process and then during the event itself. The Women's Caucus is a well-organized lobbying network comprising women from dozens of UN Member States from around the world. It proved an unprecedented success in Rio and was later instrumental in ensuring that women's voices were

heard in several other UN world conferences in the 1990s. It also helped ensure that issues related to women were systematically and effectively promoted.<sup>7</sup>

At the Earth Summit, for example, the processing of the texts was an enormous effort as the conference document swelled into a massive pile totalling almost 800 pages. In the preparatory phase, the women organized into groups that concentrated on specific sections and suggested alterations. These were compiled and approved. In general, this process is usually repeated several times as the documents are constantly changed throughout the preparatory process.

Another challenging task is the process of negotiations in which the suggested amendments are “lobbied in.” Their inclusion is not alone guaranteed by the fact that they are well-researched and written in the style of UN documents. The amendments must be pushed through negotiations by either delegates or representatives of the secretariat as NGO representatives do not usually have the right to speak in the official subcommittees and negotiation groups. The success of such a large-scale lobbying operation requires plenty of “like-minded” partners in both the delegations and the conference secretariat. Creating these collaborative relationships is crucial to the process and requires expertise and credibility.

The success of lobbying is also vitally dependent on the willingness of the Secretary-General of each conference to cooperate with women’s unofficial networks. In the 1990s, conference Secretary-Generals such as Maurice Strong (Secretary-General of UNCED),

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7. The core team of the Women’s Caucus often spent weeks at the conference site during preparatory committee sessions and the actual conference. They possessed language and lobbying skills, expertise, and the ability to create relationships with the delegations of like-minded countries and the UN secretariat. They also acted as part of an extensive network. Many women were able to stay at the conference site for the time required due to backing from their organizations or at their own expense. The expenses of women from developing countries were covered by funding and grants collected in cooperation with donor governments, foundations and institutions.

Nafis Sadik (Secretary-General of the International Conference on Population and Development and Executive Director of UNFPA), Juan Somavía (Secretary-General of the World Summit for Social Development—WSSD), and Gertrude Mongella (Secretary-General of the Beijing Conference) were all well disposed to working with women's groups. They, together with several delegations, often expressed their satisfaction at the fact that women suggested significant improvements to the relevant conference texts.

At the world conferences held during the UN Decade for Women, governments had already adopted the principle that all organs and bodies of the UN system had the duty to “mainstream the gender perspective” and take into account the implications and impacts of their decisions and policies on women and men, respectively (Pietilä and Vickers, 1996). The women's caucus proposals were extremely helpful in the application of this principle and therefore very well-received.

As a result of the women's strategy, UNCED's Agenda 21 underwent great changes during the preparatory process and during the conference itself. The preliminary drafts of the document mentioned women in less than a handful of places—all in the “poverty” section or in the context of women and children as “vulnerable groups” or victims. In the final version of Agenda 21, the issues and concerns of women had been introduced in hundreds of places, most notably in paragraphs dealing with environmental policy, the use of natural resources, consumer policy and sustainable development.

At the end of the Earth Summit, Maurice Strong gave full credit to the women's lobby when he said, “I think we have moved the cause of women and the awareness of their importance a tremendous step forward, thanks to the women who have been with us all the way to Rio....And they've got to continue after Rio.” Bella Abzug revealed the central rule that made the women's action so

effective: "to be the best organized and most unified and effective group can come from being the best informed." She went on to say that "the story of the global women's movement is, however, still a work in progress. Mothering earth will take many hands and minds" (WEDO, 1983).

### **Diving into the Mainstream of World Conferences**

With the development of a systematic and comprehensive strategy to influence inter-governmental conferences, the approach itself also became comprehensive. Even the very concept of equality gained new substance; mere statistical and technical equality on men's terms in a men's world was no longer the aim. Women began demanding that their views and objectives be taken equally into account in the issues addressed by the conferences. Thus women have contributed to these events with totally new ways of conceiving issues that would not have been provided by men.

The topics of the series of large world conferences organized by the UN during the 1990s were all highly important for women. Consequently, the joint advocacy of women's interests continued systematically from one year and one conference to another; women literally dived into the mainstream of the inter-governmental process.

Women's advocacy work continued at the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993. Since preparations for a world conference usually take at least a couple of years, the women's preparatory campaign for the Vienna Conference was already underway alongside preparations for the 1992 Earth Summit. This campaign was led by another US-based organization, the Center for Women's Global Leadership, headed by the dynamic professor and activist Charlotte Bunch.

The campaign was launched with a world-wide petition demanding that the conference take women into account with regard to human rights issues in general, and that it address violence against women in particular. The petition was circulated in late 1991 and signed by 250,000 people from 120 countries. The petition campaign worked in two ways: it alerted women all over the world to human rights issues, and mobilized them to influence the Vienna Conference. It also helped disseminate information about the Vienna Conference, of which most people were unaware.

At the Vienna NGO Forum, violence against women was addressed so forcefully and consistently that it was not possible to ignore the issue anymore. A special chapter on women's human rights was included in the Programme of Action adopted by the conference, and the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women later in the same year. The conference also prompted the UN Commission on Human Rights to appoint, in 1994, a Special Rapporteur to investigate and report on

#### **MAIN UN WORLD CONFERENCES HELD IN THE 1990S**

- *UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*
- *World Conference on Human Rights (WCHR), Vienna, 14-25 June 1993*
- *International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Cairo, 5-13 September 1994*
- *World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995*
- *Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW), Beijing, 4-15 September 1995*
- *Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II), Istanbul, 4-15 June 1996*
- *World Food Summit (WFS), Rome, 13-17 November 1996*

violence against women, and to provide the Commission with proposals regarding the issue.

In a special issue, the international Human Rights Tribune gave credit to the women's campaign and described it as a "great success story" for the Conference on Human Rights. The paper said the campaign had been a vital contribution to publicity for the conference in general, and it had forced UN Member States to take women's human rights into account in the last meeting of the preparatory committee and the conference itself (Human Rights Tribune, 1993).

The International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in September 1994, evaluated developments in population issues since the first Population Conference held in Bucharest in 1974. The Cairo Conference dealt with, among other things, the issue of a woman's right to decide on the number and spacing of her children. This had been a controversial subject for years, despite the fact that it had been accepted as a basic human right in several UN programmes and conventions since 1968.

It seemed obvious that environmental and population issues were inseparable: how many people can be supported sustainably and humanely on the earth? A woman's right and opportunities to control the number of her children, and the need to produce food for her family were key questions. UNFPA was the body within the United Nations system responsible for the Cairo Conference preparations, and UNFPA Executive Director Nafis Sadik was appointed as the event's Secretary-General. Activities of the Women's Caucus were once again coordinated by WEDO.

A major task at the Cairo Conference was to ensure that the decisions pushed through by women at the Earth Summit and at the Human Rights Conference were not watered down or withdrawn. Women's "advocacy" was so successful that the Population

Conference was called another major step forward for women's and girls' right to control their own lives and status in the family.

The ICPD document was the first in which governments recognize and acknowledge the fact that people are treated differently from the very beginning of their lives, depending on whether they are born female or male. Therefore, there is a need to place emphasis on the girl-child's right to be born, get enough care and food, have access to education, and not become the target of sexual abuse or the victim of exploitation in pornography and prostitution.

The document also calls for men's equal responsibility in family planning, and duties such as childcare and household chores. A strong emphasis is put on men's responsibility for implementing these principles since they still hold the overwhelming power in most societies and almost all walks of life.

It has been said that the Programme of Action (A/CONF.171/13/Add.1) adopted by the ICPD speaks "feminist language." No wonder the Holy See and a group of the most patriarchal governments were upset with the consensus in which the Programme was finally adopted. In her closing words, Nafis Sadik stated that "this Programme of Action has the potential to change the world...over the next 20 years [it] will bring women at last into the mainstream of development."

The World Summit for Social Development in March 1995 in Copenhagen was a cry for social development and human values in the impersonal world of unfettered market forces in the 1990s, when social structures were breaking down both in industrialized and developing countries. Eradication of poverty is the first and foremost concern of women since the majority of the poor in the world are women, and the feminization of poverty is a reality in poor and rich countries alike. The Social Summit brought up the issue of increasing poverty in the midst of plenty, and it aimed to, among

other things, convince Heads of State and Government to commit themselves to policies toward the eradication of poverty.

One of the initiators of the Social Summit, and its Secretary-General, was Juan Somavía of Chile. His career as a supporter and advocate of social development dates back to President Allende's time and the progressive atmosphere of the UN in the 1970s. Mr. Somavía described the Social Summit as "a deep cry of alarm...and a moral and ethical challenge to governments, business, media, trade unions, political parties, religious traditions, intellectuals, civil society in general, and all of us individually [to give social development] the highest priority both now and into the 21st century" (Somavía, 1995).

Women activists were on the move in Copenhagen. Once again, they ensured that achievements of the three previous world conferences of the 1990s were not watered down or deleted. Mr. Somavía was pleased with the contributions of women in support of the Social Summit's objectives, and he collaborated with them right from the beginning.

"The Copenhagen Summit was the international community's most forthright acknowledgement that the problems faced by women lie at the heart of the global agenda," the then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said in his assessment of the Social Summit (United Nations, 1995b).

During the Social Summit WEDO launched a campaign—entitled 180 Days/180 Ways Women's Action Campaign—to mobilize women to distribute information on the outcomes of the Vienna, Cairo and Copenhagen Conferences and to prepare for the Fourth World Conference on Women six months later. The campaign included daily events, and on International Women's Day (8 March) thousands of women marched in a torch procession "on the way to Beijing" from the city hall in Copenhagen to the Forum '95 in nearby Holmen.

## **THE BEIJING CONFERENCE: A GRAND CONSOLIDATION**

As mentioned above, the topics of the UN world conferences in the 1990s were interrelated and connected with women's lives: the environment, human rights, sexuality and family planning, social development and poverty, as well as food and human settlements. Those events helped promote widescale mobilization and awareness-raising among women worldwide; only glimpses of this can be described here.

It was known from December 1990 that the Fourth World Conference on Women would be held in 1995. This awareness influenced and gave direction to the work of preceding conferences, and particularly women's activism in connection with them. In December 1992 the General Assembly accepted China's invitation and confirmed that the Fourth World Conference on Women would be held in Beijing from 4-15 September 1995.

However, the gathering of the world's women in China's capital would prove more complicated than anticipated. The challenges were both political and practical: political reasons were often presented by the Chinese hosts as "technical problems," and practical organizational problems were turned into, and interpreted as, "political problems."

Women all over the world were asking themselves if holding a world conference in Beijing would imply supporting the Chinese government, which many regarded as totalitarian and a major violator of human rights. They wondered which would be the best way to support change in the lives of Chinese women: go there and participate in the conference in order to bring the diversity of women's thoughts and views to the doorsteps of the Chinese, or boycott the Chinese government by staying at home?

Originally the NGO Forum was to be held in a large sports stadium in central Beijing, a site considered appropriate for accommodating tens of thousands of people. However, the forum ended up being located in Huairou, a small town some 60 kilometres (about 40 miles) from the centre of Beijing. In Huairou the necessary meeting facilities and accommodation would have to be constructed. Transport connections from Beijing were by no means adequate to serve the large number of people who would be attending the forum. The Chinese government promised that all necessary structures would be built and transport problems solved in time.

### **The Greatest Success of All Time!**

The Beijing Conference was a massive success both in terms of its size and results. The official conference was attended by the delegations of 189 governments, more than any other UN conference. It had some 17,000 participants with 6,000 government delegates, more than 4,000 accredited NGO representatives, about 4,000 journalists, and many officials from all the organizations of the UN system.

The NGO Forum also broke all records, despite the fact that meeting facilities in Huairou were limited and hotels still uncompleted. In addition, its streets and alleys were turned into mud baths every other day by torrential rains. Some 30,000 participants came from all over the world, in addition to 5,000 Chinese. Around 40,000 people including journalists, visiting official delegates, lecturers, performers and Chinese police and security officers swarmed around Huairou everyday.

Notwithstanding these problems, those present at the NGO Forum regarded it as something to always remember because of the diversity of the women and the hundreds of well-known women who could be seen and heard in person from all parts of the world. There were also thousands of interesting and colourful events and

meetings, as well as personal encounters, new friendships made and reunions with old friends. It was an unforgettable experience for the “first-timers” as well as for those with experience of previous fora.

It was also easy to see at the Forum why it was worthwhile to organize the official conference and parallel events in China. First, this allowed for the participation of over 5,000 Chinese women and their interaction and discussion, as well as hearing experiences and views of women from other countries. In addition, a large number of young Chinese women and men worked at the conference and therefore got a chance to observe, establish contacts and gather impressions—which they probably never would have had the opportunity to do otherwise. Coverage of the conference by the Chinese media provided a constant flow of information to Chinese society at large; such large-scale exposure to an international event was no doubt another comparative advantage of holding the conference in China.

The 4,000 NGO representatives accredited to the official conference were provided with good working and meeting facilities in the immediate vicinity of the Beijing conference site. The facilities were used daily by 40 to 50 issue caucuses, each focusing and lobbying on their chosen section of the basic documents. Many had already participated in every preparatory committee session, studied successive drafts of the final document, and worked on it in the different preparatory stages for two years.

At the official conference site the work of these issue caucuses was coordinated by the Linkage Caucus, which comprised about 1,300 women from 73 countries. At eight o'clock every morning a “morning assembly” was held by the Linkage Caucus, at which the UN secretariat gave an update on progress of the conference proceedings, and representatives of different caucuses reported on the progress regarding their respective issues. The joy experienced by members of the caucuses as they managed to push an amendment

through was shared by all in these meetings. The more difficult the issue the greater the sense of accomplishment!

Around 85% of the recommendations that were not approved at the preparatory committee meetings and that were still in square brackets at the beginning of the conference—including the concept of “gender”—were adopted for inclusion into the final document by government delegations (WEDO, 1995).

In Bella Abzug’s words: “We did not get everything that we want....But it is the strongest statement of consensus on women’s equality, empowerment and justice ever produced by the world’s governments. It’s a vision of a transformational picture of what the world can be for women as well as men, for this and future generations” (WEDO 1995).

### **The PFA—An Agenda for Women’s Empowerment**

The official document adopted by the Beijing Conference is called the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace (PFA). First and foremost, the PFA provides an introduction to and assessment of the global situation from women’s viewpoints. It then specifies 12 critical areas of concern for which it sets strategic objectives and proposals for actions to be taken for the achievement of the objectives. These critical areas of concern are poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, armed conflicts, economy, power and decision making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, the media, the environment and the girl-child.

The mission statement at the beginning of the PFA says that “the Platform for Action is an agenda for women’s empowerment” (United Nations, 1996b). Thus, the emphasis is no longer merely on achieving equality and eradicating discrimination but on the empowerment of women so that they become full and equal partners in all

policies and decision-making processes in their communities. Equality with men in a male-dominated culture and society alone is not enough. Women need to be empowered to bring their own views to policy-making and the development of society, and to set their own priorities in accordance with their inherent values.

In the final analysis, the Beijing PFA is a grand consolidation of all the decisions that had already been made by the preceding world conferences on women and the world conferences on environment, population, human rights and social development held during the 1990s. According to projections about the results of the Beijing Conference, it would have been a "good" outcome if gains made could be maintained and not watered down, given the alliance of conservative forces present at the conference.

But the Beijing PFA proved to be much more than this. It compiles the previously adopted decisions into a coherent Platform for Action, supplements and specifies them, and brings them forward. The PFA defines women's reproductive rights more specifically than the Cairo document. It calls for men's equal responsibility as sexual partners and partners sharing family responsibilities, and demands that these objectives be taken into account in early childhood in the home and school. One of the largest chapters of the PFA deals with violence against women. It is the first-ever programme adopted by governments that addresses discrimination against and the exploitation, abuse and other problems of girl-children thoroughly and in great detail. It demands that these issues be taken into account and addressed everywhere.

In adopting the PFA governments committed themselves to effective mainstreaming of a gender perspective throughout their operations, policies, planning and decision making. The principle of "mainstreaming a gender perspective" is emphasized throughout the PFA. Governments also adopted the obligation to carry out gender impact assessments of the effects of government bills or political decisions on women and men respectively before the decisions are taken. The

clause to this effect is specifically repeated in connection with every critical area in the PFA.

“In addressing [the issue], Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively” (Platform for Action, 1996, paragraphs 79, 105, 123, 141, 164, 189, 202, 229, 252 and 273).

After the Beijing Conference, the entire United Nations system reconfirmed its commitments to implementing the PFA in all the system's policies and programmes. The most important decisions in this context are ECOSOC's Agreed Conclusions on “Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system” (ECOSOC, 1997/2, A/52/3, pp. 27-35).

As indicated earlier, there are several bodies and institutions in charge of gender-related activities and functions within the UN system today. The Division for the Advancement of Women within the UN secretariat is assisting and facilitating the work of CSW, which is the political organ in charge of gender mainstreaming and all other gender-related issues in the UN. The United Nations Development Fund for Women is an autonomous fund in association with UNDP, and INSTRAW is an autonomous agency on its own merits. Both have distinct roles in the advancement and empowering of women within the UN system.

As part of PFA implementation, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC)<sup>8</sup> also decided in 1996 to institutionalize an ad hoc arrangement that had existed since the late 1970s. It promoted the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality to the

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8. The ACC meets twice a year and brings together the executive heads of most UN agencies. The committee is chaired by the Secretary-General.

status of a standing subcommittee within the UN system for enhancing cooperation and coordination between UN agencies on implementation of the PFA and other gender-related recommendations of major UN conferences.

### **The Breakthrough of the Gender Concept**

The concept of gender did not appear in the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies as they were adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985. However, a group of women development researchers and thinkers from the Global South presented their project, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) to the Conference, which challenged the underlying processes of development as it was generally understood (Sen and Grown, 1987). They used both gender and class as vantage points to examine development programmes and strategies.

After Nairobi, the gender concept slowly began to appear in UN language. One of the signals of its arrival was given when UNDP changed the name of its Women in Development Unit to become the Gender in Development Programme in 1992. Around the same time, the Third World Survey on the Role of Women in Development was being drafted as a basic background document for the Beijing Conference. It was one of the first major documents to launch the new language into the UN process (United Nations, 1995c).

The World Survey confirmed what the DAWN report had pointed out ten years earlier: "Policies that target women only cannot achieve the best results. Nor can those which assume that public actions are gender-neutral in their effects. Hence, promoting gender equality implies a profound change in the socio-economic organization of societies: not only in the way women work, live and care for the other members of the households, but also in the way men do,

and in the way their respective roles in the family and community are articulated with the need to earn a living.”

However, the term “gender” was so disputed among government representatives during the drafting process of the Beijing Platform for Action, that all references to the word gender were in square brackets when the Conference started in 1995. But during the process in Beijing, all square brackets were removed, gender literally broke out, and the concept of gender became accepted UN language.

The issue is not only about words and concepts, it is also about perceptions and understandings concerning the relationships of men and women in society and culture. It is about recognizing that men also have gender, which influences their thinking, attitudes and behaviour. This new perception and way of thinking has become part of UN thinking. Today, the gender perspective has partially replaced traditional equality thinking as such, albeit the aim is the equality of men and women as a prerequisite for women’s empowerment.

Through the gender lens, equality is no longer only a technical and statistical perception. It is also an understanding that the views, values and experiences of men and women are different in many ways and, therefore, it is essential that both male and female views are equally heard and recognized in society, and in economic and political planning and decision making. Only then can men and women equally and democratically influence progress in society, which shapes the conditions and prerequisites of their lives. Thus, the equal participation and impact of women in society becomes not only their legitimate right, but also a social and political necessity for achieving more balanced and sustainable development.

As stated earlier in this chapter, by unanimously adopting the Beijing PFA in 1995, UN Member States committed themselves to mainstreaming a gender perspective into all areas of societal development

in their respective countries in the years to come. In 1997, the ECOSOC's agreed conclusions placed an obligation on the entire UN system to apply gender mainstreaming throughout its work.

During the Beijing+5 review and appraisal process, the Fourth World Survey on the Role of Women in Development in 1999 continued this discussion. It reviewed the consequent phases of progress in development discourses and studied the problems of the Women in Development (WID) approach and policies (United Nations, 1999b). It also pointed out the inadequacy of WID programmes due to their emphasis on women alone, and for not addressing the basic structures of inequality between women and men.

This realization opened a whole new debate and resulted in greater emphasis being placed on the concept of gender, implying that issues are to be studied from the point of both women and men. This new orientation has eventually paved the way for a new approach called gender and development (GAD), where "gender" as a category of analysis has taken the central stage. This approach is on the way to replacing the former WID perspective.

The GAD approach differs from the WID approach in three ways:

- the focus shifts from women to gender and the unequal power relations between women and men;
- all social, political and economic structures and development policies are re-examined from the perspective of gender differentials;
- it is recognized that achieving gender equality requires "transformative change."

In this conceptual reorientation, the politics of gender relations and restructuring of institutions, rather than simply equality in access to resources and options, have become the focus of development programmes, and "gender mainstreaming" has emerged as the common strategy for action behind these initiatives.

## **Some UN Definitions for Basic Concepts**

### ***Gender***

Gender refers to socially constructed roles of women and men ascribed to them on the basis of their sex, whereas the term sex refers to biological and physical characteristics. Gender roles depend on a particular socio-economic, political and cultural context, and are affected by other factors, including age, race, class and ethnicity. Gender roles are learned, and vary widely within and between cultures. Unlike a person's sex, gender roles can change. Gender roles help to determine women's access to rights, resources and opportunities.

*—Report of the Secretary General: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, A/51/322.*

Gender is defined as the social meanings given to biological sex differences. It is an ideological and cultural construct but is also reproduced within the realm of material practices; in turn, it influences the outcomes of such practices. It affects the distribution of resources, wealth, work, decision-making and political power, and the enjoyment of rights and entitlements within the family as well as public life. Despite variations across cultures and over time, gender relations throughout the world entail asymmetry of power between men and women as a pervasive trait. Thus, gender is a social stratifier, and in this sense it is similar to other stratifiers such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and age. It helps us understand the social construction of gender identities and the unequal structure of power that underlies the relationship between the sexes.

*—1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, paragraph 16. A/54/227, United Nations, 1999b.*

### ***Empowerment of Women***

The purpose of the Beijing Platform for Action is declared in the very first sentence of Mission Statement: "The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment." Thus the BPFA launched firmly

the concept of the empowerment of women, and defines it in the very first paragraph as follows:

Women's empowerment "aims at removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. This means that the principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace" (Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 1).

The UN has also developed a gender empowerment measure (GEM), an index that focuses on three variables that reflect women's participation in political decision making, their access to professional opportunities and their earning power. A country may rank high in basic human capabilities according to the human development index (HDI), or even gender-sensitive development index (GDI), but the GEM is concerned with the use of those capabilities to take advantage of the opportunities in life.

This indicator was launched in the 1995 *Human Development Report*, published by the UN Development Programme. Using GEM, the ranking of countries may change dramatically and surprisingly, and some developing countries outperform much richer industrial countries.

"In no society today women enjoy the same opportunities as men," says the *Human Development Report*. "Gender equality does not depend on the income level of the country. Equality is not a technocratic goal—it is a wholesale political commitment." And finally, the report draws a conclusion: "Human development, if not engendered, is endangered." (For more information on the GEM index, see *Human Development Report*, 1995.)

The Fourth World Survey elaborates the consequences for society: "Achieving gender equality requires that gender roles and the basic institutions of society—the market, Government, and the family—are reorganized. During the 1990s, with the shift to GAD, political rather than economic aspects of development have become the main issues of concern. Now women have to take initiative as equal partners in a participatory and 'bottom-up' process of development." It also has to be seen that enabling women to take their equal position in society does require supportive institutions and services, and for men to take a greater share of family responsibilities.

Empowerment, first and foremost, requires awareness which is created by knowledge. Thus, gender mainstreaming involves a dual strategy. One type of action places gender at the centre of the global agenda. A series of UN world conferences held in the 1990s have been especially effective in this regard. Another type of action is focused on producing gender-aware knowledge, mainly in fields that directly concern relevant economic and social policy. In this respect, the 1999 World Survey gives particular credit to the growing work of feminist economists and non-governmental organizations.

### **Reorganization and Reorientation of Women's Worlds**

How well have Member States around the world implemented their promises and decisions when adopting programmes and resolutions within the UN? This depends on the awareness, initiative and activism of women and men who are citizens and activists and who care about these issues and their governments' credibility. This is where the importance of people's voluntary organizations—NGOs—and their activities and initiatives comes into play. They are the channels and frameworks through which citizens can take action.

During the process of developing more systematic and comprehensive strategies for lobbying and influencing at the macro-level, the approaches of women's international networks have become more holistic. Equality, which has been very much an aim on its own merits, is becoming a baseline requirement for equal participation of women in decision making and for setting targets and priorities. Gender mainstreaming is a new formula, which goes much beyond equality as a goal. However, mainstreaming must not result in "malestreaming," that is women's integration into men's world. In order to act as an engine for change, women must speak in their own voice, on the basis of their own experiences and values, and eventually transform patriarchal structures.

The change in women's international orientation is also evident in the fact that women in the North are becoming more critical and putting their own economies and government policies under the microscope. Development assistance is no longer enough—nor has it ever been. Solidarity and sisterhood are needed above all. This calls for a new orientation by women in the North; talk about being agents for change must also be turned into action and political activity there. The new orientation should create changes in the policies and actions of rich countries *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world and global processes since the North is where global economic power systems, and the companies that operate in them, are located.

Recent years have also seen the creation of many new international women's organizations and networks that promote women's international cooperation and participation in politics at the macro-level. Their specific purpose is to gather women, including those in governments, to influence national actions within the UN system and other international organizations. A few examples follow of organizations that have initiated worldwide activities and whose work is directly related to UN processes aimed to advance the status of women. (Contact addresses are listed in the "Selected UN and International NGO Resources" at the back of this book.)

- **ISIS International** was formed in 1974 in Rome and Geneva to serve as a channel for women's voices, strengthen feminist analysis, and support the feminist movement across the globe. Since 1991 it has been operating from three independent offices in Manila (Philippines), Santiago (Chile) and Kampala (Uganda). In 1983 ISIS published the first widely-used report on *Women in Development: A Resource Guide for Organization and Action*.
- The **International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC)** is an information clearing-house located just under the windows of United Nations headquarters in New York. It was established just after the Mexico Conference in 1975. IWTC aims to be an innovator in communication strategies, a training and capacity-building organization, and a catalyst for creating new networks and coalitions. Without IWTC's Women's Globalnet list, the worldwide mobilization of NGOs for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Women 2000 (also known as Beijing+5), would not have been possible.
- The **International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)** was founded in 1980 and is based in New York. It maintains a global communication network of 6,000 individuals and organizations in 143 countries and works to promote women's reproductive and sexual health rights. At the 1994 Cairo Conference, it was instrumental in shifting the focus of population policies from simply numbers of people to the health, empowerment and rights of individuals.
- **Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)**, a network established in 1984 before the Nairobi Conference by a group of women researchers from the South, has been in the forefront of new directions in development thinking. DAWN's first analysis on past and present development from women's perspective, entitled *Development, Crises and*

*Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives*, became an immediate classic of development analysis when it was released in Nairobi in 1985. Ever since, DAWN has served as a network of women researchers and activists from the South, with thousands of supporters around the world.

- ***International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP)*** was established in 1986 after the Nairobi Conference. It monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. From its early years, IWRAP has organized seminars for women from Member States to follow up the juridical process connected with implementation and monitoring of the convention. Today IWRAP is a global network of activists, scholars and organizations that focuses on the advancement of women's human rights. It publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Women's Watch*, which is distributed to over 5,000 subscribers around the world. IWRAP is based at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota in the United States.
  
- The ***Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL)*** was established in 1989 as part of the Institute for Women's Leadership at Rutgers University in the United States. CWGL had a decisive role in mobilization and publicity for the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights. It has also been one of the most effective actors in international women's mobilization before and after the Beijing Conference. In addition to human rights, CWGL focuses on violence against women, sexual and reproductive health, and socio-economic well-being. Every year together with UNIFEM, UNICEF and hundreds of international and national human rights organizations and groups, it organizes a global 16 Days of Activism Campaign from 25 November to 10 December (Human Rights Day).

- The *Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)*, discussed earlier, came about in the early 1990s during the preparatory process for the Earth Summit. Within that process, a systematic and effective NGO lobbying strategy was developed and used successfully in connection with the Earth Summit, and with world conferences since. WEDO, based in New York, defines itself as an "international advocacy network to transform society to achieve a healthy and peaceful planet with social, political, economic and environmental justice for all through the empowerment of women" (WEDO 1998b). It was instrumental in expanding NGO activity around the UN world conferences in the 1990s.
- The *KARAT Coalition* is just one example of many regional and subregional women's networks and organizations. It was established in 1997 in Warsaw (Poland) as a network of women's NGOs from ten Central and Eastern European countries to promote implementation of the Beijing PFA. It also aims to help raise the region's visibility at international fora. The KARAT Coalition promoted and monitored the preparation of National Action Plans in respective countries, and encouraged and contributed to NGO alternative reports prepared in almost all Central and Eastern European countries.

These are only a few examples of the many international NGOs working in the area of women's equality issues and the UN system. They give an idea of the variety of functions, structures and modes of operation. The multitude of active women's NGOs in the world today attests to the interest, motivation and competence of women to fully exercise their role in the global arena. They are not here "as guests—they belong here," to modify a slogan used at the Beijing Conference.

Indeed, during the General Assembly Special Session on Women in 2000 the UN had to restrict the number of NGO representatives in

order not to exceed the holding capacity of its New York headquarters. This was first time that the number of NGO participants had to be limited at such an event due to lack of space. With the skills and experience gathered during the years, women prepared hundreds of suggestions for amendments and additions to the outcome document. The final document of the Special Session leaves a lot to be desired, but one can only imagine what it might have looked like without thousands of smart and knowledgeable women activists participating in the process at all levels.



## **FIVE YEARS LATER— PROGRESS AND DRAWBACKS**

One of the means by which the United Nations follows up and monitors whether Member States implement programmes and resolutions adopted by them at UN fora is an assessment and review every five years after the event. This practice was adopted by governments at the Mexico Conference in 1975, and is now also being used to follow up the other major conferences and summits organized by the UN in the 1990s.

### **Review and Appraisal as a Regular Practice**

The review and appraisal of implementation of the World Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women adopted at the Mexico Conference took place five years later in 1980 at the Second World Conference on Women, held in Copenhagen. The review of the entire UN Decade for Women (1976-1985) was undertaken at the Third World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi in 1985. However, in Nairobi it became obvious that it would not be feasible to organize a world conference every five years. Reasons included the fact that participation of both governments and NGOs was increasing significantly from one conference to another, which would make it both financially and practically impossible.

Therefore no world conference was planned in 1990 in order to conduct a five-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies. A review was to take place through the regular functions of the Commission on the Status of Women, ECOSOC and the General Assembly. But due to the fact that it would not be a highly visible international event, governments were not very motivated to participate and report on their progress. Only a small number prepared substantive reports, which was not

enough to give a global overview. Consequently, in 1990 it was decided to hold a world conference for the next five-year review and appraisal in 1995; this was the Beijing Conference.

The Beijing PFA “is aimed at establishing a basic group of priority actions that should be carried out during the next five years.” Thus another five-year review and appraisal of its implementation was to be held in 2000. However, it was to review and appraise a longer period since the Mexico World Plan of Action was extended in Nairobi in 1985, while the Forward-Looking Strategies were adopted in order to speed up and strengthen the Plan of Action’s implementation up to 2000. For this reason all existing UN programmes and platforms for action on women, adopted by governments for the last 25 years, were up for review in 2000.

Instead of a world conference, governments decided to convene a United Nations General Assembly Special Session entitled “Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century.” The Special Session as a venue for review and appraisal is a fairly-recently developed format, since it was first used for Rio+5 for the Earth Summit in 1997. It has also been used for the five-year reviews of the other world conferences in the 1990s.

The Special Session on Women, also known as Beijing+5, was held in New York from 5-9 June 2000. It was attended by 2,300 delegates from 178 Member States and more than 1,000 accredited NGOs represented by 2,000 participants.

### **Progress and Drawbacks**

For Beijing+5 the UN sent a questionnaire to Member States about their actions and policies for implementation of the Beijing PFA. By the end of 1999, a total of 133 Member States and two observers had sent in their reports. During the process of Beijing+5, 146 out of 188

Member States responded to the questionnaire. These replies were summarized in a *Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action* (E/CN.6/2000/PC/2, United Nations, 2000a), published in January 2000.

Several other reports were produced to facilitate the review and assessment, including the *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work* (A/54/227, United Nations, 1999b). The world survey has been published every five years since 1984, and is an important resource for each quinquennial review and assessment of action platforms of world conferences on women. The surveys are based on research and data from all relevant UN organizations and do not rely solely on information from governments.

Two other statistical reports published before Beijing+5 were UNIFEM's biennial *Progress of the World's Women 2000* (UNIFEM, 2000b) which covers the period from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, including the Nairobi Conference up to Beijing+5. *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*, published by the United Nations Statistics Division, was the third issued in a series that examines the status of women through statistical data and analyses (United Nations, 2000b).

These reports give an abundance of information on the situation of the world's women and progress in recent decades, and provide many criteria and indicators that had been lacking. A wealth of high-quality information on women from UN sources is available, if only governments, women researchers and activists would make full use of it. However, there are still some areas in which information is lacking. For example, there is insufficient data on violence against women, and comparative statistics are rare because of the sensitivity of the issue. A long-standing problem is that national statistical offices don't adequately disaggregate their information by gender, although the United Nations has been requesting this since the 1970s.

## **Alternative Reports from People and NGOs**

During the process of Beijing+5 there was a “double check” concerning governments’ implementation of the Beijing PFA. In most countries, women’s groups and NGOs monitor their governments’ implementation more closely than the UN can; NGOs prepared their own alternative reports in addition to governmental ones.

According to one NGO representative at the Special Session, the Beijing PFA is the culmination of women’s struggles for justice in their diverse contexts around the world. It is also an embodiment of their vision and hopes for a society that recognizes women’s rights as human rights, and not just an international document “to pay lip service to, as it is to many political delegates.”

In preparing their reports, NGOs used the same questionnaire sent to governments by the UN. They also commented on the reports of their governments, assessed PFA implementation in their respective countries, recorded their own activities related to implementation, and proposed additional actions for full implementation of the PFA.

A total of 116 alternative reports were received by CONGO. Fifteen were regional reports, 80 were national reports concerning 57 countries, and 14 were theme reports. Although there were additional reports under preparation, they were not received in time to be included in the summaries. Reports that did arrive in time were grouped and summarized in regional reports, which were compiled by the Coordinating Committee of CONGO into the *NGO Alternative Global Report*. It was forwarded to the then President of the General Assembly, Theo Ben-Gurirab (Namibia), before the opening of the Special Session.

An important result of the preparation of alternative reports was that women were mobilized all over the world to study their governments’ reports and critique them. The work done and ideas

collected in this process also provided NGO women with more competence and knowledge to comment on the official draft outcome document prepared for the Special Session. Before the preparatory committee session in March 2000, the NGO Coalition in Support of the Beijing Platform for Action was established. It comprised 171 NGOs and networks from every region of the world. The coalition compiled and presented an extensive paper of proposed amendments to the draft outcome document. This was just the beginning of NGO lobbying to influence Beijing+5 proceedings with the same strategies used in earlier UN conferences. The coalition paper was the first “package” of amendments, additions and deletions to be introduced and discussed directly with members of delegations. Between March and the Special Session in June, even more work was done by NGOs to follow up government negotiations on official draft documents and to prepare more suggestions and amendments on their behalf. These intensive lobbying activities continued up until the last negotiating sessions of the Special Session.

### **Internet as a Channel for Women’s Voices**

In connection with Beijing+5, the UN introduced WomenWatch ([www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch)), a gateway to global information on women within the UN website. It provides an alternative way for individuals from all over the world to directly communicate their views, experiences and suggestions to the inter-governmental system. Through WomenWatch, three UN agencies—the Division for Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and INSTRAW—launched global online working groups on implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing PFA. They invited men and women from around the world to participate in the review and appraisal process by contributing their views and experiences to the WomenWatch electronic discussion groups.

This innovative use of the Internet was a successful and exciting exercise that could be considered an experiment in global democracy. Most of the working groups were open for about six weeks in late 1999. The working group on End Violence Against Women lasted 16 months, from October 1998 to February 2000. A highlight of the group's process was a global video conference on A World Free of Violence Against Women, held in the General Assembly Hall at the UN in New York on International Women's Day (8 March) 1999. This unique video conference was broadcast live around the world.

Altogether 10,000 individuals from over 120 countries subscribed to these virtual working groups, and more than 1,000 contributions were posted. Many others had one-on-one exchanges that contributed to the overall dialogue.

This kind of follow-up exercise was not provided for the reviews of other UN world conferences or summits. The question might be asked if this was just another privilege for women of the North, who have more access to new information and communication technologies. But participation in the virtual discussion groups was spread evenly between the South and the North. Altogether about 45% of the participants were from the South and about 52% were from the North, while only around 19% of all Internet users are located outside Europe and North America.<sup>9</sup> In some of the discussion groups, for example on environment and decision making, more than half of contributions came from the South. On average more than half of the participants were from NGOs; between 13% and 30% were government representatives, 24% were academics, and only 7% were representatives of inter-governmental organizations (E/CN.6/2000/PC/CRP.1, United Nations, 2000c).

The discussion groups also provided an unparalleled opportunity for direct civil society participation in the inter-governmental

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9. It was difficult to obtain the exact statistics about geographic origins of participants since e-mail addresses don't always indicate the user's country of origin.

process. One might reflect on the weight and importance of 1,000 interventions of NGO and civil society representatives via the Internet directly to UN bodies, compared with only 12 speaking opportunities allotted to NGO representatives in the formal Special Session plenaries out of a total of 207 speakers.<sup>10</sup>

### **UNGASS—Hard Work and Meagre Results**

The Beijing Platform for Action is so rich and progressive, and its recommendations for policies and actions so concrete and practical, that it can create overwhelming hopes. Its vision of improving women's lives helps motivate, encourage and mobilize them. It also leads to many expectations from women, especially with respect to their governments. Beijing+5, which highlighted some achievements, also revealed shortcomings and drawbacks that can cause disappointment and frustration.

Since the Beijing Conference, unforeseen trends and macro-processes have emerged and gained momentum over the last five years. Expansion and further liberalization of international trade and accelerating economic globalization have had repercussions on the policies of industrialized countries *vis-à-vis* financing of development cooperation and allocations to UN agencies. The decline of funding from the North has seriously hampered implementation, both by the UN and recipient countries, of plans and programmes adopted by the world conferences.

The *NGO Alternative Global Report* identifies policies that have aggravated the "feminization of poverty" such as privatization of public services, trade liberalization, deregulation of economies,

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10. The electronic exchanges are available in the archives of WomenWatch ([www.un.org/womenwatch/forums/beijing5](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/forums/beijing5)). It also includes a large number of case studies—failures and successes—and experiences and reviews, which seem more authentic and personal than the governmental or even the NGO reports.

withdrawal of subsidies, downsizing of governments, substitution of food production by cash crops, and failure to monitor and regulate the inflow of foreign capital. The report also draws attention to the low pay and insecurity of many women's jobs, and it claims that "government policies of the last five years have not only failed to address this issue, but some policy decisions have actually exacerbated the situation."

Another more devastating trend is the growing rate of HIV infections around the world, especially in Africa. Originally more common in men, infection rates in women and girls are now rapidly increasing due to, among other things, certain customs and beliefs. In Africa the prevalence of HIV infection among women is higher than among men, with women under the age of 25 most at risk. About 95% of people with HIV/AIDS live in developing countries, where resources and prerequisites for effective health policies are insufficient or strained. The NGO alternative report for Africa claims the region is now worse off than five years ago due to HIV/AIDS, as well as armed conflicts since women are more vulnerable to violence.

The threats of these trends are heavy on the minds of women from the South because the realities of their lives are in contradiction with the expectations and hopes created by the Beijing Conference and the PFA. Many Southern women have said that "we cannot speak about Beijing+5, because for us it is Beijing-5!" In addition, too few women in the economically-prosperous North seem to realize the connections between the South's fate and the policies of their own governments.

The same forces that were fighting against progress and the achievements made in Cairo and other world conferences before the Beijing Conference were still active during the Beijing+5 PrepCom meeting in March 2000 and at the Special Session. Catholic fundamentalists from various countries, along with their allies from some Islamic

nations, managed to retard and even hamper the negotiation process. At times it seemed the entire conference would fail. Many asked if it would be better to have no outcome document, rather than adopting a poor document that diluted the PFA text.

This resulted in delegates and NGO observers spending long nights struggling through irrelevant arguments and filibuster techniques by some governments, and the Special Session lasted an extra 24 hours because of this. In the end, the five-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing PFA was concluded—an important outcome as such—but with very little progress made.

The outcome document, containing the Political Declaration and a text entitled Further Actions and Initiatives to Implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/S-23/10/Rev. 1), was unanimously adopted in the final plenary (United Nations, 2000f). It is extremely important that governments reaffirmed their commitment to the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and that they pledged to take further actions to ensure its full and accelerated implementation. This decision implies that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are “extended” for five more years until 2005 as the single and valid inter-governmental programme for advancing and empowering women.

### **Achievements, Obstacles and Further Actions**

Another section in the outcome document on Actions and Initiatives to overcome obstacles and to achieve the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing PFA consists of more than 200 paragraphs of recommendations to be implemented in the coming five years. In comparison with the language of the Beijing PFA, the document is weak and incoherent. It can be compared to a patchwork of hundreds of detailed suggestions and recommendations hooked to each other without any systematic structure and priorities. This is due to

the extremely difficult atmosphere of the negotiations, and lack of time and unity among Member States. Little more than a year was allocated for preparations of the Special Session, while preparations for a world conference usually take at least two.

The first thing needed after the Beijing Conference was to translate the PFA into languages other than official ones of the United Nations (English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Russian). Although there is no statistical information available, soon after the Beijing Conference it became apparent that the PFA had been translated into many other major languages, as well as several native ones including six in India. For example, women in East African villages were studying the PFA in Swahili, and in Anglophone Canada the PFA was prepared in more “reader-friendly” language and made more relevant and easier to implement in the national context.

The second task of governments was to prepare National Action Plans for implementation of the PFA within the year, and by latest the end of 1996. The instructions and deadline for this task were given in the PFA itself, which is one of the rare time-bound targets it contains. Not all countries were able to produce their reports on time, but according to a WEDO survey in September 1997—two years after the Beijing Conference—112 countries had finalized an action plan and another 21 had completed a draft. This made a total of 133, or 70% out of 189 countries, that had participated in the Beijing Conference (WEDO, 1997). The UN secretariat reports that it only received action plans from 116 governments, two observer states and five regional or subregional groups, making a total of 123 action plans. Interestingly enough, the number of countries reporting that they had a National Plan of Action prepared by 1997 is almost the same as the number that returned the Questionnaire on Review and Appraisal, which was 135 by the end of 1999 and 146 by the time of the Special Session.

Among the PFA's 12 critical areas of concern, there are clear signs of progress in education and training. School enrolment in general has increased in almost all regions, and girls' enrolment in many countries exceeds that of boys. At the secondary level, many countries show substantial increases in female enrolment between 1985 and 1997 (UNIFEM, 2000a). Women are also attending college and university in increasing numbers, and they are pursuing higher degrees which require more time in school.

Goals set in the outcome document concerning women's education include time-bound targets to close the gender gap in primary and secondary schools, and reducing women's illiteracy by half of 1990 levels by 2005. Other general targets are to ensure free and compulsory primary education for both girls and boys, and to increase adult literacy by 50% by 2015.

Although violence against women has been criminalized almost everywhere, it is still on the increase both in the home and in armed conflicts. Beijing+5 condemned so-called honour killings as well as forced marriages, the first time this had been done in an international consensus document. Strengthened measures were also called for eliminating dowry-related violence and female genital mutilation, and for stronger legislation against domestic violence in general including marital rape and sexual abuse of women and girls.

Beijing+5 confirmed that violence against women and girls is a human rights issue; thus forms of violence against women are human rights violations. There was also agreement to work toward the elimination of commercial sexual exploitation, female infanticide, and economic exploitation including trafficking in women and children.

Women's participation in paid work has risen in almost all regions of the world, and it has also spearheaded overall employment

growth in recent years. Everywhere—except for Africa—women's employment has grown faster than men's since 1980, but usually under inferior conditions (United Nations, 1999b). The problems of reconciling employment with family responsibilities are felt more and more by women because of the lack of supportive services, as well as lack of men's participation in household chores.

Four months later, on 31 October 2000, the Security Council adopted resolution 1325, which calls for integration of women in all conflict resolution processes as well as actions for resettlement, rehabilitation and post-conflict reconstruction. It also recommends special training for all peace keeping personnel on the protection, special needs and human rights of women and children in conflict situations.

Such a gender perspective would also include measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in the implementation of peace agreements.

### **Other Results—Mainstreaming Missing**

Important results and outcomes achieved in the last several years are not all recorded in the outcome document. The 1999 *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* considers it a great achievement that "the conferences and summits of the 1990s and their five-yearly reviews (as such) were crucial in raising gender awareness in the world, as they had the cumulative effect of placing gender at the centre of international discourse on policy-making relating to environment, population, human rights, food security and social development" (United Nations, 1999b).

The improvement of the status of women in the UN secretariat is not recorded in the review and appraisal documents, although there are

clear targets set for it in the PFA. Rapid improvement has taken place in recent decades. The percentage of women in the secretariat in senior and decision-making positions has increased. For example, in 1989 only 6.4% of D-1 level posts and 8.2% of D-2 posts were occupied by women; in 1999 these increased to 34.3 % and 23.2%, respectively. Thus the proportion of women in the D-1 upper-level management posts more than quintupled, and almost tripled at the higher D-2 level (United Nations, 1999b).

This improvement is due to instructions given by the then Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1993 for “exceptional measures to recruit, promote and deploy women in the shortest possible time,” as well as the 1995-2000 Strategic Plan of Action for Improvement of the Status of Women in the secretariat, introduced in 1994. The most recent target was to achieve 50% gender parity by the year 2000, which was not met.

In the early period of his time in office, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also established two important positions for enhancement of his cabinet *vis-à-vis* expertise in gender-related issues and representation of women. In January 1997 he appointed a very experienced UN veteran, Angela King (Jamaica), as Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women. In the beginning of 1998, the post of Deputy Secretary-General was established, and Louise Fréchette (Canada) was appointed.

These recent developments are worth mentioning since many people believe the UN has not successfully implemented the recommendations jointly adopted by the Member States. Progress made in the 1990s regarding the status of women in the secretariat probably beats any administration in the Member States.

There are other issues that the outcome document should have dealt with but did not. One important issue is mainstreaming a

gender perspective in all policies and actions of Member States and the UN system, which is the core issue throughout the PFA. Two years after the Beijing Conference, ECOSOC's agreed conclusions placed obligation on the UN system to apply gender mainstreaming throughout its work. In a way, these conclusions were also a recognition that gender mainstreaming is indeed a means to integrate and coordinate the work of the United Nations system.

The report of the Secretary-General on Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action says:

“Gender analysis was established as a basic requirement for mainstreaming strategy. The current situation of women and men in relation to different issues/problems and the impact of planned policies, legislation, and projects and programmes on women and men respectively—and on the relations between them—should be analyzed before any decisions are made. Gender analysis should go beyond cataloguing differences to identifying inequalities and assessing relationships between women and men....Mainstreaming also requires transformative change” (United Nations, 2000a).

In the outcome document, however, there is hardly anything said about mainstreaming and a few passing references to gender impact assessments. The only achievement mentioned in this respect is that “within the UN system much progress has been made in the mainstreaming of a gender perspective” (paragraph 24) and “progress has also been made to integrate the human rights of women and mainstream a gender perspective into the UN system, including into the work of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and the Commission on Human Rights” (paragraph 26).

Fortunately, governments adopted the Political Declaration during the Beijing+5 Special Session in which they:

“Reaffirm the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the process of implementing the outcome of other major United Nations conferences and Summits and the need for a coordinated follow-up to all major conferences and Summits by Governments, regional organizations, and all of the bodies and organizations of the UN system within their respective mandates” (paragraph 7).

In fact, gender mainstreaming and gender impact assessments are the most far-reaching obligations set by the PFA. They apply to each and every Member State as they were unanimously adopted in Beijing as the core requirement of the Platform of Action. The enforcement of these obligations as a legal procedure in Member States would constitute an automatic mechanism for gender mainstreaming and equality in legislation and policy making. Therefore, gender mainstreaming is an important issue whose implementation must be enhanced in the years to come.



## EPILOGUE—WILL THE WORLD CHANGE?

In the 1970s and 1980s the United Nations system organized a series of 20 world conferences that identified major world problems and adopted action plans in each area (see Annex III). It was the first time in history that such a planning effort on a global scale had been made.

The beginning of the 1990s saw a joint effort of the UN system with Member States and civil society to create an integrated global agenda for development. The cornerstone of that effort was “a series of global conferences and summit meetings on various aspects of development in the years leading up to the 21st century. These were designed not only to achieve concrete programmes of action but to open the world’s eyes to the reality that the issues addressed—the environment, human rights, population, social development—are interconnected. The goals they seek are all dependent upon the advancement of women” (United Nations, 1995b).

Thus the importance of advancement of women was already understood in the UN system when the series of world conferences, the so-called Global Agenda for development, was planned. The extent and significance of women’s impact on UN operations, particularly in the 1990s, has been impossible to ignore. Women act through official channels and lobbying alike, and in their respective countries they systematically follow up the implementation of decisions. This involves determined civic activism across national borders and beyond national governments.

Since the world conferences in the 1990s are seen as a Global Agenda for development, Member States and the UN have also adopted an “integrated and coordinated implementation of and

follow-up to the major United Nations conferences and summits” as the method to review and appraise these. This concerns in particular the cycle of ten-year review processes such as the World Summit for Sustainable Development, to be held in South Africa in 2002, as a ten-year follow-up conference to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

In spite of recognition of the Beijing Conference’s importance to the Global Agenda, it has been grouped with the other major conferences and summits in an integrated and coordinated follow-up process. However, the purpose and nature of the Beijing Conference, together with the earlier world conferences on women, is different from the others. The conferences on women have not dealt with a particular theme but brought to the Global Agenda the interests and aspirations of women, which previously were not adequately heard. The main aims of this process—the empowerment of women and mainstreaming the gender perspective in all the activities and policies of the UN system—are as such cross-cutting, integrating and coordinating elements that also apply to implementation of all the other major conferences and summits.

### **Future World Conferences on Women—Will There Be Any?**

To continue the progress achieved over the past four world conferences on women and maintain the momentum created among the world’s women, the NGO community has strongly called for a world conference on women in 2005. This call received overwhelming support by NGOs at the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) regional preparatory meeting in Geneva in January 2000 and the Commission on the Status of Women preparatory session in March 2000, as well as by the global NGO community gathered in New York during Beijing+5.

Governments also agreed to this in paragraph 9 of the Political Declaration adopted at Beijing+5:

“to regularly assess further implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action with the view to bringing together all parties involved in 2005 to assess progress and consider new initiatives, as appropriate, 10 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and 20 years after the adoption of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies.”

Thus NGOs are requesting governments to specify that the “event” to be held in 2005 should be a World Conference on Women. The NGOs do not want a replica of the Beijing Conference, but a high level and well-prepared major conference that would include a comprehensive review and assessment of gender mainstreaming in the process of integrated implementation and follow-up to the other major UN conferences and summits.

The central aims of such a “meta” world conference would be:

- review and appraisal of progress made in the advancement and empowerment of women since the Mexico Conference in the years 1975-2005, implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document;
- assessment of progress made from 1990-2005 in gender mainstreaming in implementation of the other major United Nations conferences and summits in the 1990s, including their reviews and appraisals;
- development of new strategies to meet the needs of women arising from global trends related particularly to economic globalization, trade, new technologies, armed conflicts and the threats posed by HIV/AIDS; and
- empowerment of women to ensure their full participation in shaping the policies for integrated and coordinated implementation of the Global Agenda for development in the 21st century.

The outcomes of five-year reviews—such as Rio+5, Vienna+5, Cairo+5 and Copenhagen+5—revealed that gender mainstreaming had not been effectively implemented. In fact, mainstreaming was neglected even in the review and appraisal of the Beijing PFA. The ECOSOC substantive session in 2000 provided some new inputs, including how to mainstream a gender perspective more efficiently in the implementation process of the Global Agenda.

Concerning the outcome of the Beijing+5 process, it became obvious that a General Assembly Special Session would not be the most effective way to establish new plans and strategies to continue the process. Therefore another kind of a procedure is needed for a system-wide review and appraisal of women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming in order to guarantee the momentum of that process.

It is also imperative for NGOs that an open and inclusive NGO Forum be held in 2005 to reaffirm their strength and motivation for maintaining and continuing the momentum and to give voice to their views and aspirations for future implementation of the Global Agenda.

Looking to the future, partnerships between men and women for the advancement of gender mainstreaming and equality in all countries and internationally have to be strengthened. Such partnerships should be built in economic, political, social, cultural and legal environments in order to advance collaboration and to reduce gender disparities.

### **A Global Women's Movement Created**

Since the 1970s women have mobilized on a world scale and at an accelerated pace, leading to the birth of a worldwide women's movement. The NGO Tribune in Mexico City in 1975 has been described as the "largest consciousness-raising session ever held." The NGO Forum

in Nairobi in 1985 has been referred to as the “birth of global feminism” (United Nations, 2000d). The *NGO Alternative Global Report* states that “as we moved beyond the 1980s, it became clear that what we had created was a global women’s movement and what we had set in motion was nothing less than a revolution” (CONGO, 2000).

The global conferences of the 1990s were pivotal in the development of a politically-able and astute global women’s movement. According to CONGO, “Strengthened by the three women’s world conferences of 1975, 1980 and 1985, women moved to the forefront in these conferences [in the 1990s] claiming a space and voice in the resulting policies. These conferences served as training grounds for a new leadership by bringing hundreds of women into the public policy process and resulting, in many countries, in a ‘critical mass’ of women with political clout.”

In past decades the majority of women participating in women’s international gatherings were mainly from the Western middle-class, representing the white minority of women from the North. The activism and dynamics of the international women’s movement has now shifted to the South. Ever since the Nairobi Conference, the proportion of women from developing countries has increased in UN conferences and their parallel events. Through their enthusiasm, motivation and preparedness for action, Southern women are providing new inspiration and faith.

Improved communications and rising levels of education and knowledge have provided more and more women with the opportunity to take part in world events. In connection with the Beijing+5 process, women were invited by DAW, UNIFEM and INSTRAW to use new information technology as a direct means to communicate with the inter-governmental system. Furthermore, motivation and faith in the importance of participation are gaining with empowerment and growing strength gained through common actions during parallel events.

The importance of the Beijing PFA for the world's women was accentuated again by the intensity and extent of women's participation at Beijing+5.

### **Every Government is Accountable to Women**

But what will take place in practice at the country level in the UN Member States? Will documents such as the Beijing PFA adopted by governments be implemented? Will cultures change and will inequality, discrimination and violence against women soon be only a memory from the past in every corner of the world?

Everything that takes place within the UN system is based on cooperation between governments and the decisions they approve. Consequently, implementation of these decisions also depends on governments' commitment to realize them in practical terms at home. This is both the strength and the weakness of the UN: the system has no authority to implement decisions directly in any country, nor the power to force any government to comply with the decisions. The only exceptions are decisions by the Security Council and UN Conventions with compliance and enforcement mechanisms.

Ultimately, practical implementation depends on the extent to which the citizens in each Member State are aware of these decisions adopted by their government at the UN on their behalf. Women as citizens can make governments accept their responsibility and accountability, but only if they know what the PFA and other programmes entail and what these imply in practice in women's lives. The formal decisions made by a world conference are only recommendations. However, they can be regarded as politically binding, particularly when adopted unanimously as was the case with the PFA and the outcome document of Beijing+5.

The weakest point of women's strategy lies at the national level. Although tens of thousands of women from around the world have participated in the events parallel to the world conferences, they are still only a small fraction of all women. The great majority of women do not know the potential power behind these programmes, platforms and resolutions adopted by their governments. They are not empowered to use them as effective tools in their country to change their lives and the lives of others.

Therefore, an immense amount of work is required to prevent the decisions adopted by governments at the UN from gathering dust on shelves. It is our task, of women and men committed to gender equality and women's empowerment, to ensure that governments do not forget their commitments. We should question governments' credibility unless they meet the objectives they have adopted. And when governments change, incoming ones should be made aware of commitments already made since international commitments remain valid in spite of change in governments.

Implementation of the Platform for Action must take place separately in each country, and this is something where every one of us can accept part of the responsibility. It is crucial that the Platform for Action is "operationalized" and transformed into practical action in schools, organizations, political parties and all respective institutions. It is the responsibility of everyone to see to it that governments implement their own decisions. Without citizens' activism and contribution—and in this case without women's activism and contribution—UN decisions will not be implemented in practice, no matter how good they are on paper.

At the beginning of Beijing+5 Special Session, Secretary-General Kofi Annan praised the Beijing PFA as "one of the most remarkable documents since the United Nations Charter itself." He described the Beijing+5 negotiation as "among the most important that we will undertake in this Millennium year. Its outcome will not only be

crucial to the rights and lives of women everywhere: it will also be crucial to the achievement of the goals at the Millennium Summit.” He said that he wanted to put the world on notice that “the future of this planet depends on women.”

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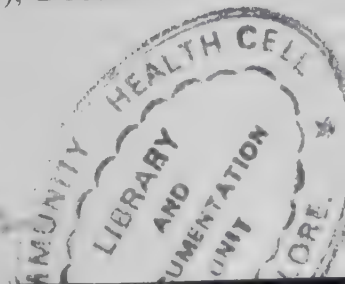
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# **ANNEXES**



## **Annex I**

The first session of the United Nations General Assembly in London, 12 February 1946:

### **AN OPEN LETTER TO THE WOMEN OF THE WORLD**

“An Open Letter to the women of the world from the women delegates and advisers at the first Assembly of the United Nations:

This first Assembly of the United Nations marks the second attempt of the peoples of the world to live peacefully in a democratic world community. This new chance for peace was won through the joint efforts of men and women working for common ideals of human freedom at a time when the need for united effort broke down barriers of race, creed and sex.

In view of the variety of tasks which women performed so notably and valiantly during the war, we are gratified that seventeen women representatives and advisers, representatives of eleven Member States, are taking part at the beginning of this new phase of international effort. We hope their participation in the work of the United Nations Organization may grow and increase insight and in skill. To this end we call on the Governments of the world to encourage women everywhere to take a more active part in national and international affairs, and on women who are conscious of their opportunities to come forward and share in the work of peace and reconstruction as they did in war and resistance.

We recognise that women in various parts of the world are at different stages of participation in the life of their community, that some of them

are prevented by law from assuming full rights of citizenship, and that they therefore may see their immediate problems somewhat differently. Finding ourselves in agreement on these points, we wish as a group to advise the women of all our countries of our strong belief that an important opportunity and responsibility confront the women of the United Nations: first, to recognise the progress women have made during the war and to participate actively in the effort to improve the standards of life in their own countries and in the pressing work of reconstruction, so that there will be qualified women ready to accept responsibility when new opportunities arise; second, to train their children, boys and girls alike, to understand world problems and the need for international cooperation, as well as the problems of their own countries; third, not to permit themselves to be misled by anti-democratic movements now or in the future; fourth, to recognise that the goal of full participation in the life and responsibilities of their countries and of the world community is a common objective toward which the women of the world should assist one another.”

Signed by:

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt (United States)

Mrs. M. Lefaucheaux (France)

Miss Minerva Bernardino (The Dominican Republic)

Mrs. Dalen (Norway)

Mrs. Verwey (The Netherlands)

and 12 other women delegates to the General Assembly

## **Annex II**

### **CALENDAR OF PROGRESS OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

- 1945 United Nations Charter reaffirms “faith in fundamental human rights...in the equal rights of men and women...” (Preamble).
- 1947 Commission on the Status of Women is established to initiate and monitor UN action on behalf of women.
- 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex...” (Article 2).
- 1954 General Assembly recognizes that women are “subject to ancient laws, customs and practices” inconsistent with the Declaration and calls on governments to “abolish” them (Res. 843, IX).
- 1963 General Assembly, noting continued discrimination, calls for a draft of a Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (Res. 1921, XVII).
- 1966 Commission on the Status of Women submits draft to General Assembly, which returns it for revision “bearing in mind the amendments which have been submitted” (Res. 2199, XXI).
- 1967 General Assembly adopts the revised Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women “to ensure

- the universal recognition in law and in fact of the principle of equality of men and women" (Res. 2263, XXII).
- 1968 Economic and Social Council initiates reporting system on implementation by governments of Declaration's provisions (ECOSOC Res. 1325, XLIV).
- 1970 General Assembly urges "the ratification of or accession to the relevant international instruments relating to the status of women" (Res. 2716, XXV).
- 1972 The UN Secretary-General asks for the views of governments on the "nature and content of a new instrument."
- 1973 ECOSOC appoints a 15-member working group to begin drafting a convention with effective procedures for its implementation.
- 1975 International Women's Year World Plan of Action calls for "the preparation and adoption of the convention on the elimination of discrimination against women with effective procedures for its implementation" (Item 198).
- 1977 General Assembly appoints Working Group of the Whole "to continue consideration" of the draft convention (Res. 32/136).
- 1978 General Assembly recommends the working group complete its task (Res. 33/177).
- 1979 General Assembly adopts completed draft and invites signatures and ratifications (Res. 34/180).

1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women enters into force with the required 20 ratifications.

Source: *Rights of Women*, Workbook of the International Women's Tribune Center, New York, 1983.



## Annex III

### UNITED NATIONS WORLD CONFERENCES

#### United Nations World Conferences (1972-1990)

Note: The titles in italics indicate conferences that focused on women or paid special attention to women-related aspects of the subjects concerned.

UN Conference on the Human Environment  
Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972

*UN World Population Conference*  
Bucharest, 19-30 August 1974

*World Food Conference*  
Rome, 5-19 November 1974

*World Conference of the International Women's Year*  
Mexico City, 19 June-2 July 1975

HABITAT: UN Conference on Human Settlements  
Vancouver, 31 May-11 June 1976

*Tripartite World Conference on Employment, Income Distribution,  
Social Progress and International Division of Labour*  
Geneva, June 1976

Conference on Economic Cooperation Among Developing  
Countries  
Mexico City, 13-22 September 1976

UN Water Conference  
Mar del Plata, 14-25 March 1977

UN Conference on Desertification  
Nairobi, 29 August-9 September 1977

World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination  
Geneva, 14-25 August 1978

UN Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing  
Countries  
Buenos Aires, 30 August-12 September 1978

Primary Health Care Conference  
Alma Ata, September 1978

*World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development*  
Rome, 12-20 July 1979

*UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development*  
Vienna, 20-31 August 1979

*World Conference of the UN Decade for Women*  
Copenhagen, 14-30 July 1980

UN Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy  
Nairobi, 10-21 August 1981

UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries  
Paris, 1-14 September 1981

*World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the  
UN Decade for Women*  
Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985

International Conference on Relationship Between Disarmament  
and Development

New York, 24 August-11 September 1987

World Summit for Children

New York, 29-30 September 1990

**United Nations World Conferences in the 1990s**  
**“The Global Agenda”**

The global women’s movement made a significant impact on all the  
following conferences.

*UN Conference on Environment and Development*

Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992

*World Conference on Human Rights*

Vienna, 14-25 June 1993

*International Conference on Population and Development*

Cairo, 5-13 September 1994

*World Summit for Social Development*

Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995

*Fourth World Conference on Women*

Beijing, 4-15 September 1995

*Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II)*

Istanbul, 4-15 June 1996

*World Food Summit*

Rome, 13-17 November 1996



## **Annex IV**

### **SELECTED UNITED NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL NGO RESOURCES**

#### **United Nations**

Division for the Advancement of Women  
2 UN Plaza, DC2-12th Floor  
New York NY 10017, United States  
fax +1-212/963 3463  
e-mail <daw@un.org>  
website ([www.un.org/womenwatch/daw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw))

United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)  
304 East 45th Street, 15th Floor  
New York NY 10017, United States  
telephone +1-212/906 6400  
fax +1-212/906 6705  
e-mail <[unifem@undp.org](mailto:unifem@undp.org)>  
website ([www.unifem.undp.org](http://www.unifem.undp.org))

United Nations International Research and Training Institute  
for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)  
Calle César Nicolás Penson 102-A  
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic  
telephone +1-809/685 2111  
fax +1-809/685 2117  
e-mail <[instraw.hq.sd@codetel.net.do](mailto:instraw.hq.sd@codetel.net.do)>  
website ([www.un.org/instraw](http://www.un.org/instraw))

INSTRAW's Gender Awareness Information and Networking System ([www.un-instraw-gains.org](http://www.un-instraw-gains.org))

UN website on women's issues ([www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch))

### **International NGOs**

African Women's Development and Communications Network

PO Box 54562

Nairobi, Kenya

telephone +254-2/741320

fax +254-2/742927

e-mail <[sara&roy@samnet.zm](mailto:sara&roy@samnet.zm)>

Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA)

PO Box 442

Tunapuna, Trinidad and Tobago

telephone +1-868/663 8670

fax +1-868/663 6482

e-mail <[cafrainfo@wow.net](mailto:cafrainfo@wow.net)>

Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL)

Douglass College

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

160 Ryders Lane

New Brunswick NJ 08901-8555, United States

telephone +1-732/932 8782

fax +1-732/932 1180

e-mail <[cwgl@igc.org](mailto:cwgl@igc.org)>

website ([www.cwgl.rutgers.edu](http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu))

Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations  
in Consultative Relationship with  
the United Nations (CONGO)

website ([www.conferenceofngos.org](http://www.conferenceofngos.org))

*In Geneva:*

Palais des Nations, Room Boc. 93  
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland  
telephone +41-22/917 1881  
fax +41-22/917 0373  
e-mail <[congongo@iprolink.ch](mailto:congongo@iprolink.ch)>

*In New York:*

Church Centre  
777 United Nations Plaza, 8th Floor  
New York NY 10017, United States  
telephone +1-212/986 8557  
fax +1-212/986 0821  
e-mail <[congongo@aol.com](mailto:congongo@aol.com)>

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)  
Care of University of South Pacific  
Box 1168  
Suva, Fiji  
e-mail <[dawn@is.com.fj](mailto:dawn@is.com.fj)>

European Women's Lobby  
18 Rue Hydraulique  
B-1210 Brussels, Belgium  
telephone +32-2/217 9020  
fax +32-2/219 8451  
e-mail <[ewl@womenlobby.org](mailto:ewl@womenlobby.org)>  
website ([www.womenlobby.org](http://www.womenlobby.org))

Flora Tristan Women's Centre  
Parque Hernan Velarde 42, Santa Beatriz  
Lima 1, Peru  
telephone +51-1/433 0694  
fax +51-1/433 9500  
e-mail <postmast@flora.org.pe>

International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)  
24 East 21st Street  
New York NY 10010, United States  
telephone +1-212/979 8500  
fax +1-212/979 9009  
e-mail <info@iwhc.org>  
website (www.iwhc.org )

International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP)  
Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs  
University of Minnesota  
301-19th Avenue South  
Minneapolis MN 55455, United States  
telephone +1-612/625 5093  
fax +1-612/624 0068  
e-mail <iwraw@hhh.umn.edu>  
website (www.igc.org/iwraw)

International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC)  
777 United Nations Plaza  
New York NY 10017, United States  
telephone +1-212/687 8633  
fax +1-212/661 2704  
e-mail <iwtc@iwtc.org>  
website (www.iwtc.org)

ISIS Internacional—Santiago  
Casilla 2067 Correo Central  
Santiago, Chile  
telephone +56-2/633 4582 or 638 2219  
fax +56-2/638 3142  
e-mail <isis@reuna.cl>

ISIS International  
PO Box 1837  
Quezon City Main, Philippines  
telephone +63-2/435 3405 or 435 3408  
fax +63-2/924 1065  
e-mail <webms@isiswomen.org>  
website (www.isiswomen.org)

ISIS—Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (WICCE)  
PO Box 4934  
Kampala, Uganda  
telephone +256-41/266007 or 266008  
fax +256-41/268676  
e-mail <isis@starcom.co.ug>

KARAT Coalition  
ul. Franciszkanska 18/20  
00-205 Warsaw  
Poland  
e-mail <karat@waw.pdi.net>  
website (www.friends-partners.org/ccsi/eeurope/poland/karat.htm)

Latin American and Caribbean Committee for  
the Defence of Women's Rights (CLADEM)  
Jr. Estados Unidos 1295, Jesus Maria  
Lima 11, Peru  
telephone +51-1/463 9237  
fax +51-1/463 5898  
e-mail <cladem@chavin.rcp.net.pe>  
website (www.derechos.org/cladem)

South East Asia Watch  
c/o President's Office, Mirian College  
Katipunan Road, Diliman  
Quezon City, Philippines  
telephone +63-2/924 6769  
fax +63-2/426 0169  
e-mail <licuanan@mc.edu.ph>

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)  
355 Lexington Avenue, 3rd Floor  
New York NY 10017-6603, United States  
telephone +1-212/973 0325  
fax +1-212/973 0335  
e-mail <wedo@igc.apc.org>  
website (www.wedo.org)

Women in Development Europe (WIDE)  
Rue du Commerce 70  
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium  
telephone +32-2/545 9070  
fax +32-2/512 7342  
e-mail <wide@gn.apc.org>  
website (www.eurosur.org/wide)

The United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) is an interagency programme of the UN system that facilitates dialogue and fosters cooperation between the UN system and the NGO community worldwide on global development issues. NGLS has offices in Geneva and New York.

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- ☐ International Agency for Atomic Energy (IAEA)
- ☐ International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
- ☐ International Labour Office (ILO)
- ☐ Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
- ☐ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- ☐ United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, UNCHS (Habitat)
- ☐ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- ☐ United Nations Department of Public Information (UN/DPI)
- ☐ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- ☐ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- ☐ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- ☐ United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP)
- ☐ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- ☐ World Bank
- ☐ World Food Programme (WFP)

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- ☐ UN-NGLS, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/917 2076, fax +41-22/917 0049, e-mail <ngls@unctad.org>
- ☐ UN-NGLS, Room DC1-1106, United Nations, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/963 3125, fax +1-212/963 8712, e-mail <ngls@un.org>

Website ([www.unsystem.org/ngls](http://www.unsystem.org/ngls))





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